

THE CLINTON CONTRAS • WHERE THE WILD THINGS ARE

In These Times

INDEPENDENT NEWS & VIEWS

May 3, 1998

Spring Books

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Uncivil Society

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Spinning Clinton

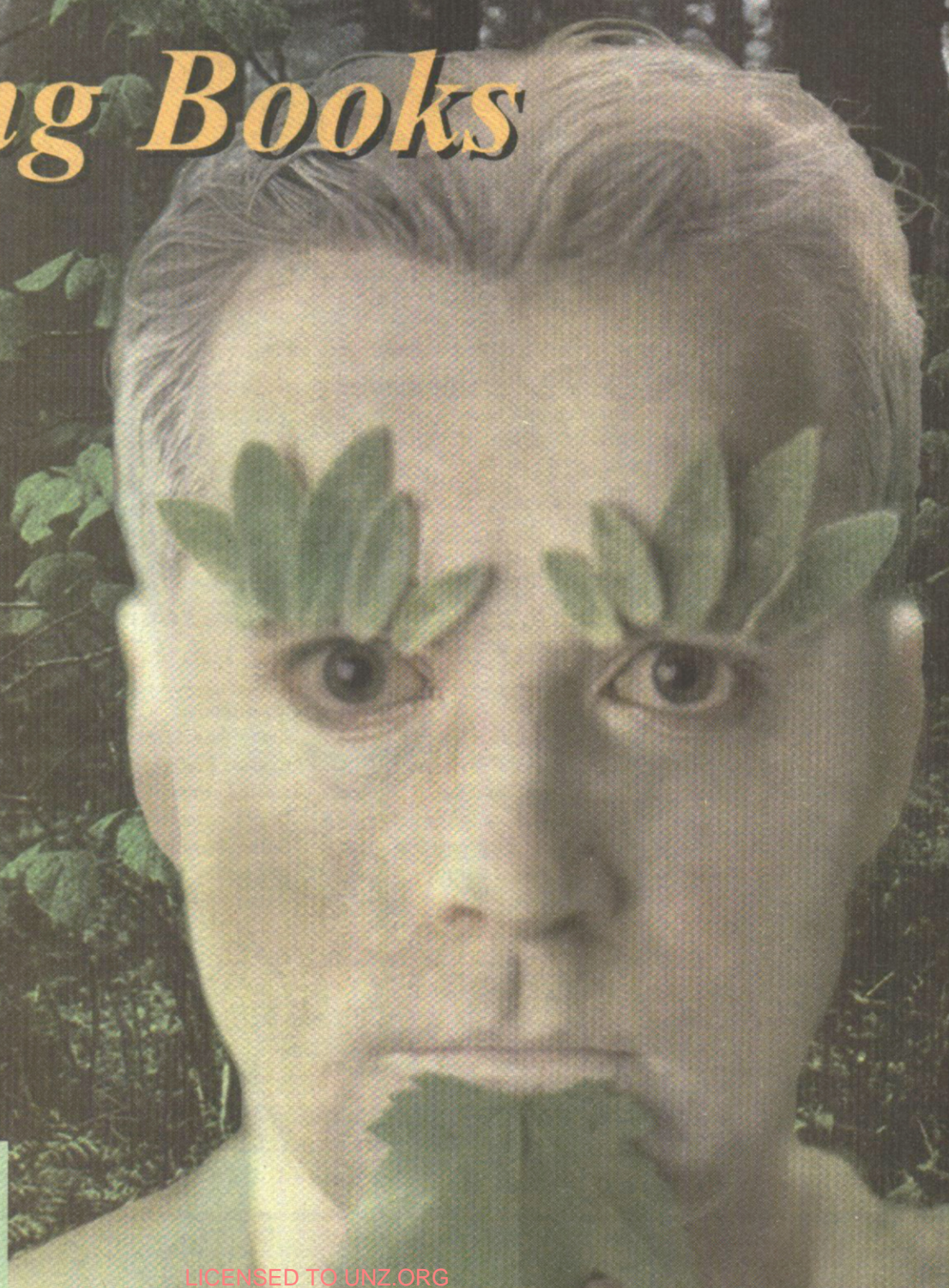
Rick Perlstein
*Liberals and
Discontents*

J.J. Goldberg
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Alex Lichtenstein
Alan Wolfe's Nation

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In These Times

INDEPENDENT NEWS & VIEWS

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Editorial

The Biggest NATO Money Can Buy

What industry spends the most money trying to influence Congress? Weapons manufacturing, which in turn receives the largest share of the federal budget.

So far this decade, the four-dozen companies whose main business is arms have given \$32.3 million to congressional candidates, \$5 million more than those other merchants of death, tobacco companies. Add in the \$50 million that the six-largest arms makers spent on lobbying Congress in the past two years, and you get an idea of the huge investment that a handful of military-industry executives have made to shape our nation's domestic and international priorities.

When the Soviet Union collapsed and the Cold War ended, arms makers faced an uncertain future. Millions of Americans expected to see a peace dividend—the transfer of a substantial portion of the nearly \$300 billion a year spent on the military to social needs. That would have been good news for most Americans but bad news for military suppliers. The arms budget has been somewhat reduced—most substantially by George Bush—but the loss in military-industry revenue has been compensated for with billions of new dollars being spent each year to promote and finance arms sales abroad. For example, in 1995, in only one of several such federally funded efforts, the Clinton administration won congressional approval for the \$15 billion Defense Export Loan Guarantee Fund, which covers military contractor losses when foreign customers cannot afford to honor weapons-sales agreements (see "Guns 'R' Us," Aug. 11, 1997).

Now, with the push to enlarge NATO, weapons manufacturers have an opportunity to make an even greater killing in overseas sales. That's why recent lobbying efforts by the big-six arms merchants—Lockheed Martin, Northrop Grumman, Textron, Raytheon, Boeing and McDonnell-Douglas—have

focused on NATO expansion.

Not incidentally, expanding NATO has also been the cornerstone of Clinton's foreign policy agenda these past four years. He touts it as a way to stabilize Europe, but Europe doesn't need this kind of stabilizing. Neither the original members of the alliance nor the proposed new members—Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary—face any foreseeable military threats.

If anything, NATO expansion could destabilize the new member countries by forcing them to borrow heavily and divert huge

**Replacing
Russian military
hardware will be
a windfall for
Western arms
manufacturers.**

sums away from social and infrastructure investment. NATO membership requires a great increase in military spending by the new members, who will be required to upgrade their technology and make their weapon systems compatible with NATO. Replacing Russian military hardware with new equipment will be a gigantic windfall for Western arms

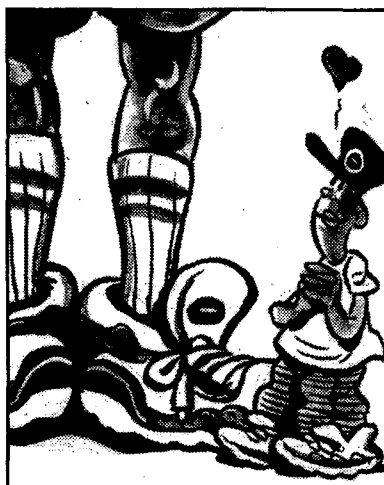
manufacturers, as well as an added burden on American taxpayers.

Over the next decade, the cost of this conversion could run into hundreds of billions—half of which, under the treaty now before the Senate, will be paid by the United States. To replace one Russian MIG-21 with an F-16 made by Lockheed, for example, would cost \$18 million—replacing it with an F-18 made by Boeing would cost \$40 to \$60 million. Consider that Poland alone wants to buy 100 to 150 of these new planes.

NATO expansion is being portrayed in the media as a done deal, but—despite the massive amounts of money that military suppliers are spending to assure victory—the treaty faces significant opposition in Congress. For a long time, cigarette makers also bought votes in Congress, but public outrage against smoking has proved a powerful antidote to tobacco's big bucks. An outcry against further militarization of the world could have the same effect on the expansion of NATO. —J.W.



Cover photo by Jeff Griffin
Cover design by Estelle Carol



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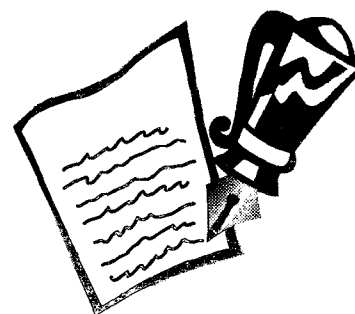
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Letters



No Ill Will

In her article "Out of the Shadows" (February 8), Nina Schuyler summarized the history of mental health treatment and tried to explain the Mental Health Parity Act in three brief pages. Perhaps for this reason, many readers were confused as to which illnesses "are largely diseases of the brain" and which will receive insurance parity. Hence, the critical letters by James A. Cronin and Steve Weiss (March 8).

The severe and persistent mental illnesses that are considered biological in nature are schizophrenia, schizoaffective disorder, manic depression, major depression and anxiety disorders, such as panic disorder and obsessive compulsive disorder. But by no means are all of the diagnoses in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual brain disorders. There are also personality disorders, sexual problems, marital problems, learning problems, addiction or dependence on drugs and alcohol, and problems from traumas such as combat, child abuse or rape. In all cases, therapy and rehabilitation are an accepted and essential part of the road to recovery.

The letters you published mislead the public in an already murky area. Certainly, the slam against the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill indicated a

lack of knowledge about that organization, whose members are primarily families trying to educate and advocate about serious brain disorders.

Elizabeth W. Farrell
National Alliance for the
Mentally Ill, West Virginia
Morgantown, W.Va.

True, members of the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill who have family or friends who suffer from these disabilities are hopeful that researchers will develop more effective pharmaceuticals to treat their loved ones. But James A. Cronin's dismissal of the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill as a "parrot" of the pharmaceutical industry is dangerously misleading. And his vague reference to a 1994 *Scientific American* article, which purportedly refutes the mountainous research on the causes of the major mental illnesses, does not hold.

The fact is that mental illness is an illness that cannot be cured, but, like diabetes, it can be treated. Finding the best possible treatment for each sufferer is the

challenge. The families whose economic security and peace of mind have been devastated by this illness look to equity of insurance coverage as just one small step toward the solution of the problem.

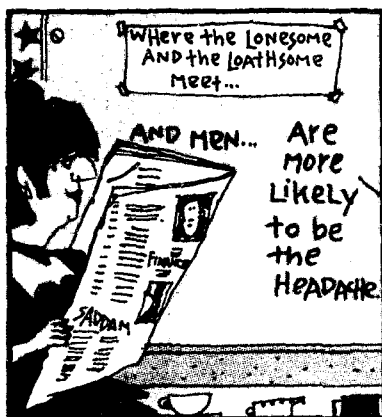
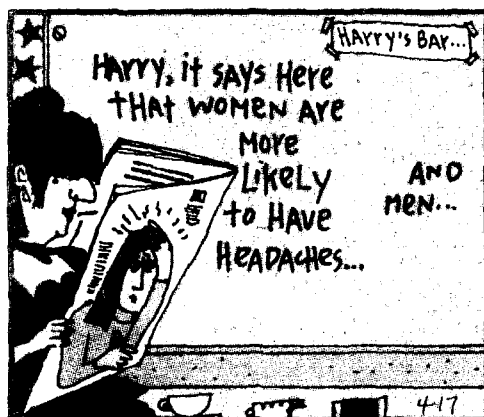
Florence E. Fitzgerald
La Mirada, Calif.

Taking Responsibility

While Clinton's plan for childcare is flawed, it does mark a sea change ("The Next Frontier," March 8). Childcare and early childhood education are finally being accepted as a public responsibility. As a teacher in early childhood education for 19 years, I remain hopeful because public debate and education on this issue has begun—but the struggle is still on.

Two factors that are missing from Kim Phillips-Fein's article, however, are wages and turnover. The most important predictor of quality in childcare is staff wages. The average childcare worker earns \$15,788 a year and 85 percent of childcare workers make less than \$7 an hour. Home providers make even less. Quality early childhood education is the

Nicole Hollander



Sylvia

foundation of a child's lifelong learning achievement. The presence of consistent, sensitive, well-trained and well-compensated caregivers is the most important determinant of quality care.

Thus, the best long-term solution is a major new investment in early childhood education and development. Investing now in childcare will save millions in the long run. After all, do we want confident, loved children ... or more prisons?

Lauren M. Tozzi
Seattle

News from the Newsroom

We at *In These Times* bid a fond farewell to Deidre McFadyen, who is moving on after ably serving for the past two years as executive editor. We thank her for all her hard work. We are also saying a sad goodbye to Pat Arnow, who for the past year has edited our culture section from her North Carolina home. We wish them both the best at their new endeavors.

Joel Bleifuss, who has written for *In These Times* since 1986, will stop throwing stones and assume the job of managing editor. Assistant editors Craig Aaron and Jefferson Decker are also moving into new positions. Craig will serve as news editor. Jefferson, who previously worked at *Lingua Franca*, will be the new culture editor. We are currently in search of an assistant editor (see the ad on page 36). ■

History Lesson

In an interesting article, John Nichols compares the new New Party to the Non-Partisan League ("After Fusion," March 22). One of the many innovative things that set the Non-Partisan League apart from any other political organization before or since is the fact that it generally did not recruit candidates from among aspiring politicians (especially in its early years). Instead, members went around a local farming community and asked who was the most respected farmer in the area. Then, they did everything possible to convince that person to run for office with their backing. That person did not have to be a member of the Non-Partisan League.

As Max Nomad has pointed out, left parties often turn into a job placement organization for administrators. The New Party may face a similar danger unless it institutes safeguards such as the one mentioned above.

Jack Dunn
Omaha, Neb.

Immaculate Conception is a special development created by the pope to allow Mary to be in Heaven even though no place in the Bible shows Mary to be baptized. The pope decreed that Mary was born without original sin and, hence, could be in Heaven.

Arthur Dutky
Omaha, Neb.

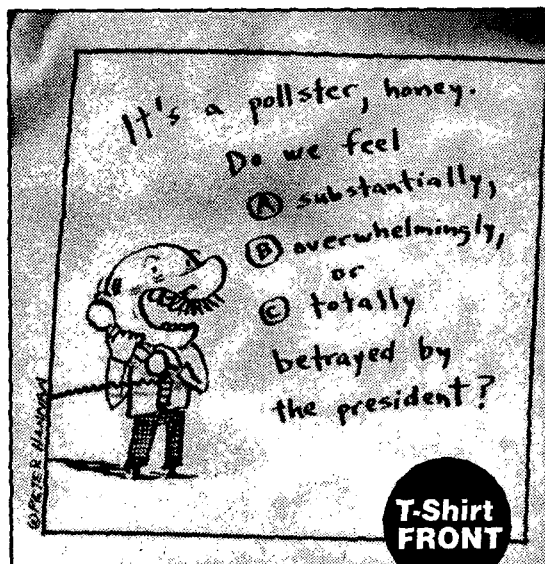
Immaculate Correction

The heading "Immaculate Misconceptions" below the Appall-o-meter picture of a young lady—in bed with her TV set—becoming pregnant, is in error (March 22). The gal's problem is not Immaculate Conception, as you indicated, but rather Virgin Birth.

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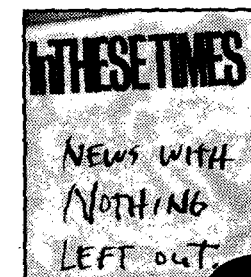
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Absolutely Yeltsin

BY FRED WEIR

Russian President Boris Yeltsin unexpectedly purged his entire government in late-March, tossing out most of the veteran members of his reform team in a stunning display of his near absolute powers.

Yeltsin sacked the dour but steady prime minister, Viktor Chernomyrdin, who ran the country through five crisis-packed years. Another victim was the aggressively ambitious interior minister, Anatoly Kulikov, chief of Russia's police and its most viable military force, the 300,000-strong interior troops. Gone too is Deputy Prime Minister Anatoly Chubais, the architect of Russia's deeply corrupt privatization campaign and the most pro-Western politician on Yeltsin's team. Chubais had been considered ripe for sacrifice since last fall, when he was caught accepting a veiled bribe in the form of a \$90,000 advance for a still unwritten chapter in a book about Russian privatization (see "Robbing Russia Blind," January 11).

Many other cabinet ministers were quietly brought back in the days that followed, strengthening the impression that those three were the real targets of Yeltsin's purge. The new acting prime minister, 35-year-old Sergei Kiriyenko, is a liberal ex-banker with barely a year's experience in national politics and no power base of his own.

Having removed the most experienced and able top players, Yeltsin may be setting himself up to run for president again in 2000, even though a third term is forbidden by the constitution he authored. The Constitutional Court—which is widely viewed as a tool of the Kremlin—is considering the argument that Yeltsin's first term doesn't count because he was elected in 1991 in a dif-

ferent country, the Soviet Union, under different laws.

Yeltsin's clean sweep set hearts palpitating in Washington, where—off the record—Clinton administration officials complained about not being consulted in advance. Chernomyrdin's departure is a special headache for U.S. planners. The stolid prime minister had been regarded as a kind of insurance policy against chaos should the ailing

ing to position Chernomyrdin as the logical successor. That's what triggered Yeltsin's wrath."

Yeltsin is notoriously jealous of threats to his authority. When he underwent heart surgery in 1996, for instance, he handed the nuclear suitcase—his badge of office—to Chernomyrdin just moments before going under the knife and snatched it back five minutes after coming out of anesthesia.

Another theory says that Yeltsin replaced his government in hopes of forestalling mass protests over deteriorating economic conditions. Yeltsin himself explained the firings as an effort to "give new impetus to economic reform," but in the next breath insisted that economic policy would not change. "The hallmark of Yeltsin's political style is to meet crisis with theater," says Viktor Levashov, an analyst at the left-wing Institute of Social and Political Research. "He names the guilty officials and ceremoniously fires them. In this way he shows at once that he is completely in charge but totally blameless. It makes a perfect substitute for real activity."

Meanwhile, the Asian financial crisis has sucked foreign money out of Russia's financial system, causing the Moscow stock market to lose half its value in six months and the cost of government debt to double. Plunging oil prices in recent weeks have brought Russia to the brink of bankruptcy—excise taxes on oil exports account for 25 percent of total government revenue. Russia's chronic problem of public sector wage arrears has also reached a dangerous new peak as government funds have dried up. "Political explosions are coming," says Levashov, "and our president, as always, is looking to save himself." ■



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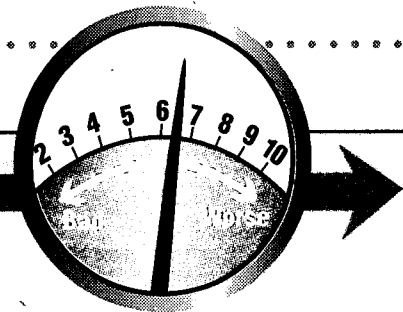
and visibly fading Yeltsin suddenly leave the stage.

During his most recent trip to the United States, Chernomyrdin was treated like a visiting head of state and paired constantly with Vice President Al Gore as "leaders of the future." According to one theory, this is what did Chernomyrdin in. "Chernomyrdin survived all those years by showing almost dog-like loyalty to Yeltsin," says Andrei Piontkowski, director of the independent Center for Strategic Studies. "But lately, because of fears about Yeltsin's health, the Americans and many in the Russian elite have been try-

appall-o-meter

BY DAVID FUTRELLE

The In These Times Index of Indecencies



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Father Nature

As El Niño battered the West Coast this winter, an elderly Nipomo, Calif., man named Al Niño says he received numerous calls from angry Californians who blamed him for the mess. "It's happened at least a half-dozen times," Niño told the *Los Angeles Times*. "It's always something like, 'Why are you doing this?' And I say, 'Well, I didn't really have nothing else to do. I thought maybe it would be kind of fun.'"

Death of a Salesman

Charles Cornell was, by all accounts, the very model of a modern British salesman: clever, hard-working and aggressive. Unfortunately, after a recent car accident, his personality changed—for the better. A court in London recently awarded Cornell \$535,000 in damages after hearing testimony that the salesman had become much "nicer to be around" and "too nice" to work effectively, London's *Daily Telegraph* reports. "The accident has taken away the competitive edge," Cornell's counsel told the court. "His relatives find him a more pleasant personality—less aggressive. He now muddles through life. ... Not a good image for a salesman."

Fired Up

This hurts me more than it hurts you: A recent study of heart-attack victims conducted at 45 hospitals across the United States from 1989 to 1994 explored the

link between work and heart-attack risk. It found that the most stressful events were deadline pressure and firing people. According to Dr. Murray A. Mittleman of Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center in Boston, the risk of a heart attack doubled for managers in the week after they fired someone.

And the Winner Is ...

After watching *Chicago Hope* star Christine Lahti miss her big moment at this year's Golden Globe Awards because she was in the bathroom, the makers of Kaopectate hit on a novel way to get their product in the spotlight during the Oscars in March, according to a press release. The company sent custom-made "Kaopectate Oscar Relief Baskets" to some of the top nominees—hoping to help them give a "solid performance" during the nerve-wracking event. ■

the right

The End of Innocence

BY FREDERICK CLARKSON

Over the past six months, Barnes & Noble has been simultaneously targeted by a Christian Right censorship campaign and vilified as a corporate predator that overruns traditional independent bookstores. As fate would have it, Barnes & Noble's public relations problems have collided at the Rev. Jerry Falwell's Liberty University in Lynchburg, Va.

It all started with Operation Rescue head honcho Flip Benham. In addition to their usual intimidation tactics at abortion clinics, Benham and his militant membership have been busy plastering high schools all over the country with posters picturing gory fetuses.

Meanwhile, Operation Rescue has joined with Focus on the Family and the

American Family Association in a direct-action campaign against Barnes & Noble for selling what it calls "child pornography." In particular, these groups object to books by photographers David Hamilton and Jock Sturges.

When Benham was invited to speak at Liberty University last fall, he led a group of Liberty students down to Lynchburg's E.C. Glass High School, where they blocked the doors to the building and were arrested for trespassing. This got Benham six months in jail and irked Falwell by disturbing town-gown relations.

When Benham was thrown in the hoosegow, his colleagues converged on Lynchburg. They discovered that none

other than Barnes & Noble had taken over Liberty's campus bookstore, where—Lo and Behold!—they found a copy of Hamilton's *The Age of Innocence*, a book that got the chain indicted in Alabama and Tennessee for selling child pornography.

Now, Operation Rescue has called for a similar indictment in Lynchburg against the campus bookstore and Falwell. "It is a sad commentary that Dr. Falwell would not condemn child pornographers," says Keith Tucci, the former head of Operation Rescue. "In fact, he invited them onto his Liberty University campus. Yet, he has condemned the Rev. Flip Benham for preaching the gospel at E.C. Glass High School." ■

The Nurses' New Deal

BY DAVID BACON

Ending more than a year of strikes and conflict, California nurses reached an agreement with Kaiser Permanente, the nation's largest HMO, at the end of March. The four-year agreement excludes Kaiser's demands for serious wage concessions and contains an innovative provision that moves toward the most controversial and hardest-fought of the nurses goals: giving the union a role in monitoring quality-of-care issues.

The agreement, which covers more than 7,500 nurses in the state, creates 18 paid, independent "quality liaison" positions for nurses selected by the union. These nurses will monitor quality-of-care conditions that affect patients, including staffing levels. It is the first contract in the country that gives nurses the ability to monitor care and influence decision-making on this issue.

The previous contract between Kaiser and the California Nurses Association (CNA) expired in January 1997. Kaiser, with 2.7 million enrollees in California, took a very hard line in bargaining, demanding 15 percent reductions in the salaries of hundreds of CNA members.

The CNA countered with a high-profile campaign that focused on the declining quality of care for Kaiser patients. As Kaiser has sought to cut costs and compete with other health plans, its hospital closures and staff reductions have dramatically increased job stress, particularly for nurses.

At the same time, Kaiser has closed a number of its older hospitals in urban neighborhoods, especially those serving largely minority communities, while opening others in wealthier suburbs. The CNA not only accused the HMO of "medical redlining," but dramatized cases where closed emergency rooms led to the deaths of patients as they were transferred to other medical facilities farther away.

The CNA initiated a series of one- and two-day strikes to highlight the nurses' situation. The nurses avoided an all-out strike, during which an HMO can actually make money since it doesn't have to pay strikers and continues to collect its monthly premiums. The limited strikes, however, forced Kaiser to scramble to keep its doors open, costing the HMO an estimated \$10 million per day and driving administrators crazy with scheduling logistics.

During the strikes, other hospital employees generally respected the nurses' picket lines. Tensions rose, however, when the Service Employees International Union (SEIU)—along with other AFL-CIO unions—signed a partnership agreement with Kaiser. The agreement was strongly criticized by CNA for, among other reasons, restricting the ability of participating unions to raise patient-care issues (see "Whose side are you on?" August 11, 1997).

In early March, SEIU Local 250, which represents other Kaiser hospital employees, reopened its contract early and signed a new agreement with the HMO with no concessions and three percent annual wage increase. This contradicted claims Kaiser made in full-page ads attacking the CNA, which insisted that the company needed concessions from the nurses.

In addition to establishing the quality liaisons, the nurses' new contract includes three percent annual wage increases. The union also agreed to enroll its retirees in Kaiser and conceded that new hires in Santa Rosa and Sacramento would start at a lower tier, taking seven years to reach the top scale instead of the current five.

"We just wore them down," CNA Executive Director Rose Ann Demoro says. "We didn't need a partnership. It was a victory for good, old-fashioned collective bargaining." ■

It's Over

The longest-running labor dispute in the country finally ended on March 22, when the United Auto Workers (UAW) approved a six-year contract with Caterpillar.

The UAW had worked without a contract since 1991, striking twice only to return to work without a deal. While workers walked the picket lines, Caterpillar racked up record profits as thousands of scabs rushed to the plant for higher-paying jobs. Many considered the struggle to be the biggest setback for labor since President Reagan fired striking air-traffic controllers in 1981.

But the rank and file persevered, rejecting two union-brokered deals, including one in late-February, when the company refused to reinstate 50

fired strikers (see "It's not over ... 'til it's over," April 5).

Caterpillar eventually agreed to rehire the 50 strikers, and the deal, which covers around 13,000 workers, was approved by 54 percent of the union voters. The pact also ensures job security until 2004 and provides for a lump-sum wage increase.

In exchange, the union dropped its 400-plus complaints before the National Labor Relations Board, accepted a two-tier wage system and agreed not to penalize workers who crossed the picket lines during the dispute.

Caterpillar also dropped its closely watched Supreme Court case, which would have ruled whether companies must pay employees that work full time for the union.—C.A.

Press Pass

Bauer Power?

BY CRAIG AARON

When Ralph Reed resigned as director of the Christian Coalition last July, Gary Bauer, head of the ultra-conservative Family Research Council, stepped in to fill the vacuum.

In December, a slobbery profile by Fred Barnes in *The Weekly Standard* declared Bauer "Washington's Most Formidable Conservative." Now, apparently dissatisfied with the GOP's big tent strategy, Sunday-morning punditry and mere inside-the-Beltway notoriety, Bauer is pondering a run for the White House.

He admits that he's the "longest of long-shots," but this unapologetic ideologue could really shake things up in the Republican primaries. "Bauer is the quintessential social conservative," writes Michelle Cottle in the April issue of *The Washington Monthly*. "He opposes abortion, gun control, gay rights, no-fault divorce, women in military combat, bilingual education, and the National Endowment for the Arts. He supports school choice, school prayer, abstinence-only sex ed, the death penalty, an increase in the per-child tax credit, tougher obscenity laws, and tax breaks for stay-at-home spouses."

But, Cottle points out, Bauer is no "run-of-the-mill right-winger." Unlike many of his fellow Republicans, he recognizes the role government can play in advancing the conservative social agenda. Bauer has irked the Republican establishment with his outspoken opposition to social security privatization, free trade with China and the flat tax. In turn, he has forged unusual alliances with everyone from House Minority Leader Dick Gephardt to actor Richard Gere.

But what has really turned heads in Washington is Bauer's fund-raising clout. Since he took control of the Family Research Council in 1988, it has gone from a \$200,000 organization

with 3,000 constituents to a \$14 million institution with a constituency of half a million. Meanwhile, Cottle reports, his political action committee, the Campaign for Working Families, raked in \$2.6 million in 1997—a non-election year. If he runs for president, he'll likely enjoy the backing of conservative Christian radio host James Dobson, president of the 2.2 million-member Focus on the Family, who has already threatened to remove his support from the GOP for abandoning social issues.

Of course, Bauer has about as much chance of being elected President as Ralph Nader. The group he threatens most are the Republicans who have settled in to what *Washington Post* columnist Richard Cohen calls "a permanent presidential candidacy." Barnes reports that both Dan Quayle and Bay Buchanan, Pat's sister and campaign manager, have asked Bauer to stay out of the race.

Bauer has already caused enough trouble for the Republican leadership. In January, the Campaign for Working Families helped ultra-conservative Tom Bordonaro defeat Brooks Firestone—Newt Gingrich's candidate of choice—in a California special primary to fill the seat of Rep. Walter Capps, a Democrat who died in October. Bauer's group poured \$100,000 into TV ads attacking Firestone for voting against a ban on partial-birth abortion.

The big winner? Capps' widow, Lois, who beat Bordonaro in the March 11 election by a margin of 53 to 45 percent. The Democrats held onto the district (which, ironically, is the home of Ronald Reagan) thanks largely to the votes of moderate Firestone supporters.

Hello, President Gore.

"The wars, for now, are over," writes editor Anthony Borden in his introduc-

tion to the March issue of *WarReport*, a journal that for the past six years has provided some of the best coverage of the conflicts in the Balkans and the Caucasus. In April, the journal will be absorbed by *Transitions*, which focuses on the changes in post-Communist societies throughout Europe and the former Soviet Union.

The final issue of *WarReport*, which includes dispatches from Christopher Hitchens, Roy Gutman and a host of regional journalists, reflects on the lessons learned in the war years and the future prospects for the region. "The persistence of immediate security risks, the depth of the fundamental problems and the continuing inadequacies of the international effort suggest that—despite all of the attention and the tragedy—sufficient lessons have not been learned after all," Borden writes. "By conspiracy, catastrophe, or a combination of the two, the effect of the international involvement was exactly the opposite of what was intended: not to halt the bloodshed, but, in fact, to help drive it." The limp international response to the atrocities in Kosovo is only the most recent example.

.....

In his R. Crumb-meets-gonzo-journalism style, cartoonist Joe Sacco provides a completely different take on the former Yugoslavia in his latest comic book, *Soba* (Drawn & Quarterly, P.O. Box 48056, Montreal, Quebec, Canada, H2V 4S8). Near the end of the war in 1995, Sacco spent five months in Sarajevo, where he met Soba—an artist, musician, man-about-town and planter of land mines. The book relays the harrowing everyday realities of Sarajevo's youth in the war and its aftermath. "My life is ruined," Soba tells the author in one scene. "Our generation was sacrificed. Half of my friends no longer exist." ■

education

Required Reading

BY SILJA J.A. TALVI

When a pair of San Francisco Board of Education members proposed a quota-based literature curriculum, which would have mandated that 40 percent of the required reading list for public high school students consist of "authors of color," irate community members, parents and pundits went on the warpath. The debate was quickly framed as one of extremes: San Francisco's students could have either Shakespeare or Toni Morrison—but not both.

Board members Keith Jackson and Steve Phillips first drafted the quota-based proposal in an effort to improve academic performance in a school district where students continue to perform poorly on college-entrance exams and where African-Americans have an alarming D average. Many students in the district, 88 percent of whom are people of color, have complained of feeling alienated from assigned literature and offended by the racist language in works like Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*.

Scholars such as Geneva Gay of the University of Washington have argued that students are damaged by negative representations of their own cultures as well as a basic lack of information about their heritage. Many educators mistak-

enly assume that students of color already know about or have access to literature by authors who share their ethnicity.

In 1993, students at San Francisco's predominantly Latino Mission High School staged a walk-out; their demands included an increase in assigned literature by Latino authors. Spurred by this protest, Phillips began developing a proposal with Jackson to bolster the district's multicultural curriculum. "There was no real universal model for us to follow and putting numbers in seemed to be a way of ensuring that diversity," says Phillips, an African-American attorney who has served on the board since 1982. "I knew it would attract attention, but I didn't know it would be this visceral."

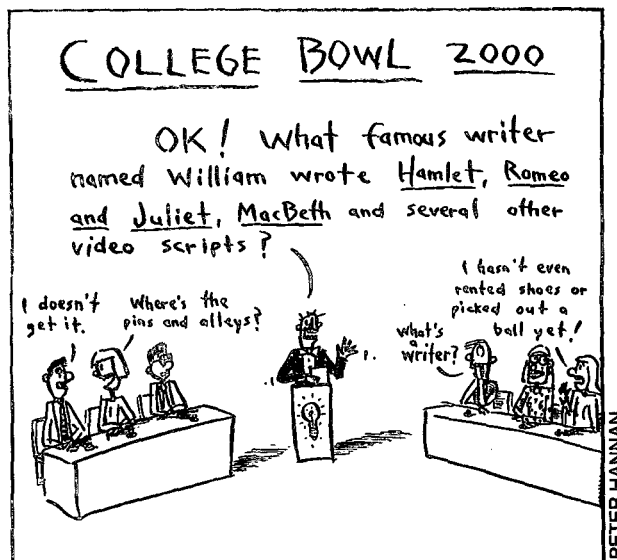
The quota-based system touched a raw nerve with California conservatives and liberals alike. Some local talk show hosts and columnists went so far as to accuse the plan's proponents of "ethnic cleansing." Detractors viewed the effort as a threat to the tradition of classic literature. While no board member advocated the elimination of any Euro-American

novel, the proposal was derided as "anti-Shakespeare" by its critics. Richard Rodriguez, the San Francisco-based author of *Hunger for Memory*, told the *San Francisco Chronicle* that he feared that the classics of the Western tradition would be tossed out if the district's literary traditions were based on a "political agenda."

On March 19, the board listened to five hours of impassioned and angry testimony from hundreds of students, teachers and parents. While a diverse group turned out in support of the proposal, racial tensions were inflamed by the fact that all of the audience members voicing opposition to the plan were white. Eventually, the board agreed on an amicable compromise, trading in the quota proposal for a revamping of the core curriculum. Under the plan, the required reading list for 9th to 11th graders will include works referenced on the SAT, books by writers of color and the acknowledgment of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender authors.

The board's decision made San Francisco the first city to pass such a mandate, and the California Department of Education is now looking at ways to diversify its own overwhelmingly European and Euro-American reading list. Phillips says he hopes other school districts will soon follow suit. ■

Silja J.A. Talvi is a Seattle-based writer.



online

- The Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees (UNITE) has collaborated with Cornell University on a Web site commemorating the Triangle shirtwaist factory fire, the 1911 tragedy that is still New York City's worst-ever industrial disaster. The fire killed 146 garment workers who either burned or jumped to their deaths, unable to reach the factory's one fire escape. The site (www.ilr.cornell.edu/trianglefire/) contains audio interviews with survivors, photos, hundreds of original documents and a history of sweatshops.
- The National Labor Committee's recent report on working conditions in China, *Made in China: Behind the Label*, is available in its entirety online (www.nlcnet.org). The report documents atrocious working conditions at factories making apparel for Ann Taylor, Ralph Lauren, Kmart, Liz Claiborne, Esprit and others. Perhaps most notably, the committee's investigators discovered at least three factories making handbags for Wal-Mart and Kathie Lee Gifford, everyone's favorite sweatshop spokesmodel. At the Liang Shi plant, workers toil up to 70 hours a week for as little as 13 cents an hour.

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Remember Seguin

BY JUAN GONZALEZ

Virtually every American knows about Davy Crockett, the frontier legend who died with the Texas rebels defending the Alamo. Barely anyone has heard of Juan Seguin, the Tejano rancher who fought alongside Crockett and survived.

Seguin's ancestors settled present-day San Antonio 50 years before the American Revolution. Seguin went on to fight with Sam Houston at the Battle of San Jacinto, was a founding senator of the Texas Republic, and later served as mayor of San Antonio. But in 1842, Anglo newcomers to Texas repaid Seguin's loyalty by chasing him from office at gunpoint, seizing his land and forcing him into exile in Mexico, thus making him the last Hispanic mayor of San Antonio until Henry Cisneros took office 140 years later.

Seguin is the forgotten patriarch of Latino political power in America. His story is not told more often because it connects the Hispanic American to a historical stream that is at odds with the one championed by descendants of the Jamestown or Plymouth colonists.

Seguin's legend may be making a comeback. By early in the new millennium, Latinos will be exercising unprecedented political power. In a mushrooming democratic revolution that will echo what African-Americans accomplished in the '70s, Latino candidates will wrest majority control of hundreds of school boards and rural governments throughout the very Southwestern and Western lands conquered from Mexico 150 years ago. The same will happen in key urban centers of Florida, the Northeast and the Midwest. By then, one or two Hispanic-Americans could well be sitting in the U.S. Senate.

Despite the latest wave of "English Only" sentiment among some white and black Americans, restrictive immigration laws and Supreme Court decisions nullifying majority-Latino congressional districts, the political awakening of Hispanic America is unstoppable for several reasons.

- **A rush to citizenship:** Hispanic immigrants, feeling threatened by initiatives like California's Proposition 187, which cut public benefits to immigrants, have responded by applying in record numbers for naturalization, rather than remaining indefinitely as legal residents. The Immigration and Naturalization Service received 530,000 citizenship applications in fiscal year 1994. By 1997 that figure skyrocketed to 1.4 million. The bulk of new applicants are Latinos.

- **Demographics:** Hispanics are significantly younger (median age 26) than non-Hispanic whites (34) or blacks (29),

and have far higher birth rates. Thus, they will make up a larger percentage of the country's voters in the next century regardless of changes in immigration patterns.

- **The rise of a socially-conscious Latino middle class:** During the '80s a significant Latino professional and business class arose that has the technical skills, resources and will to exercise power at all levels of government. This group, with the unique exception of the Cuban-American wing, still identifies with blue-collar Latinos rather than the upper classes of U.S. society.

- **The maturing of Latino labor leadership:** The '80s saw several million young Latinos enter the American work force. Many of them were Central and South American refugees who had acquired considerable political awareness and leadership skills as a result of civil wars in their homelands. These Latino workers now constitute the backbone of labor's resurgence, from Justice for Janitors in California and the rise of Las Vegas as a union mecca, to the militant hospital and hotel workers of New York City.

A harbinger of the future was the 1996 congressional victory of Loretta Sanchez, a political neophyte, over Rep. "B1-Bob" Dornan in Orange County, Calif., that sun-drenched bastion of right-wing Republicanism. In that year, 5 million Latinos also voted for president, up from 4 million in 1992. Clinton received 72 percent of the Latino vote, a huge jump over the 61 percent he got in his first election. Even in Florida, where Cubans have historically been loyal Republicans, he garnered a surprising 44 percent of the Latino vote and carried the state. Yes, even Cubans have turned away from Republican policies on immigration and language.

Last year in the mayoral contests in our two biggest cities, New York and Los Angeles, the number of Latinos who went to the polls exceeded the number of blacks for the first time. In each city, Latinos gave near majorities to victorious Republican candidates—48 percent to Richard Riordan and 45 percent to Rudy Giuliani. Those voters awarded Riordan and Giuliani for distancing themselves from the rabid anti-immigrant platforms of their fellow Republicans.

For more than three decades, the black-white racial divide has dominated the national political climate. Now, in the post-Rainbow Coalition era, Latinos are emerging as a "third force" in American politics. No matter whom they choose to ally with in local and national elections from here on, the demand will be the same—equal representation.

Forget Crockett, remember Seguin. ■



The Clinton Contrass' Smoke & Mirrors

The "vast right-wing conspiracy" to impeach the president.

By Frederick Clarkson

Some 350 people packed a small auditorium at the Cobb County Civic Center in Marietta, Ga., for the first National Town Hall on Impeachment. The March 14 event, organized by a small group called Citizens for Honest Government and a reinvigorated John Birch Society, was designed to create the appearance of a unified, popular and spontaneous outpouring of support for impeaching President Bill Clinton.

The staged rally is only one piece of a multifaceted far-right strategy to hobble the Clinton presidency. Hillary Clinton's claim notwithstanding, this effort is less a "vast conspiracy" than a detailed plan conceived and implemented by political leaders and skilled operatives to whom the future of God and country—or at least the conservative revolution—is at stake.

The rally was held in support of HR 304, a resolution of inquiry sponsored by Rep. Bob Barr (R-Ga.) that represents the first stage of an impeachment process in the House. The Barr resolution, currently backed by 22 members of Congress, was conceived at a meeting last June of the political action arm of the Council for National Policy (CNP), a super-

secretive conservative leadership forum (see "Right Wing Confidential," August 8, 1994). The rally epitomizes the dynamics of the Republican Party in the '90s. Cobb County sits just north of Atlanta, straddling the congressional districts of Barr and House Speaker Newt Gingrich. One of the main purposes of the rally, which was held in Gingrich's district, was to send the speaker a "message."

Outside, volunteers urged passersby to pick up John Birch Society literature and organizers sold anti-Clinton videos. Inside the auditorium, an eerie mood and serious demeanor marked the uniformly neat, white-skinned and often white-haired crowd.

The speakers, wearing time-warped black suits and white shirts, could just as well have been railing against the Kennedy administration. In addition to Barr, they included: Howard Phillips, the 1996 presidential candidate of the Christian nationalist U.S. Taxpayers Party (see "On the fringe with the U.S. Taxpayers Party," September 16, 1996); Catherine McDonald, widow of the late Rep. Larry McDonald, whose seat Barr now holds; former Rep. Bill Dannemeyer (R-Calif.);

militia maven Rep. Helen Chenoweth (R-Id.), who spoke on the telephone; and John McManus, head of the John Birch Society. McManus, who also heads a special project called Impeach Clinton ACTION, was promoting a special "impeachment edition" of the Birch Society magazine, *The New American*.

McManus said he believed that Clinton's ultimate goal was to "surrender" the United States to "Red China" or possibly the United Nations. Other speakers suggested that Bill Clinton and others in his administration had committed "treason" by soliciting campaign contributions from China in exchange for transferring military and computer technologies. Barr darkly alluded to "classified information" that he had seen, but about which he could say no more. While these claims might seem outlandish, they are the stuff of a conspiracist world-view that animates the ideology of many on the far-right, particularly the anti-Clinton movement. The audience, a well-disciplined contingent of Barr's core constituents from the John Birch Society and the Taxpayers Party, provided plenty of standing ovations for the benefit of the news cameras.

Local television covered the rally, and that evening ABC's *World News Tonight* punctuated its ongoing Zippergate coverage with a piece on the event. Left out of the news was anything about the people, institutions and ideology behind it.

On their way to the rally, many would have traveled on the Lawrence P. McDonald Freeway, a slab of interstate which winds its way through Cobb County. The road commemorates the late congressman, a fierce anti-Communist who died when the Korean Air Lines flight 007 was shot down by the Soviets in 1983. But in Cobb County and other right-wing bastions across the country, McDonald is better remembered as a chairman of the John Birch Society.

The society, founded at the end of the McCarthy era, was a major catalyst for Barry Goldwater's 1964 presidential campaign. It subsequently fell into disrepute in some conservative circles for being conspiratorial and anti-Semitic. Membership dropped from a peak of about 100,000 in 1964 to about 25,000 at the time of McDonald's death. As the society declined, many of its leaders became the ideological founders of the Christian right, as Christian nationalism began to eclipse anticommunism as a potent political strategy. Retooled for the '90s, the society is re-emerging as an important player in right politics. Currently, it is trying to rally public opinion toward the impeachment of President Clinton.

While the Birchers provided the bodies, the logistics of the rally were the responsibility of Citizens for Honest Government, a project of Creative Ministries Inc., a Westminster, Calif., nonprofit. At the impeachment rally, the president of Citizens for Honest Government, Patrick Matrisciana, tacitly

acknowledged that his group may be abusing its nonprofit tax status by supporting the Barr resolution. He told *In These Times* that his group would "change its structure in the months or years to come, so we'll be in a position where we can do more advocacy work and lobbying. We don't do any lobbying now, we're primarily an information source." Asked what else Creative Ministries, which has been in existence for 20 years, does, he said it "does good deeds" such as "sending Bibles to homeless people, or whatever."

Creative Ministries is also in the movie business. Matrisciana's production company, Jeremiah Films, has produced films that attack gays and environmentalists. The company also makes apocalyptic videos such as "Earth's Two-Minute Warning," which examines "Bible-predicted signs of the end times." Matrisciana also distributes a film that "proves" UFOs are real. However, these aliens are not from outer space. They have been sent by Satan as part of "a worldwide enterprise of subliminal production."

While videos about the end of the world and UFOs may seem to be an unlikely addition to Matrisciana's arsenal of political propaganda videos, this supernatural conspiracy involves Clinton. Many premillennialist evangelicals believe that a final showdown with the forces of Satan is at hand, embodied in the activities of Clinton and his inner circle.

Matrisciana's tour de force has been *The Clinton Chronicles*. The video (and a book version) implicate Clinton in cocaine sniffing, drug smuggling, money laundering, murder (of Vince Foster) and sexual harassment (of Paula Jones). This video stew of allegations seeks to convince conservative Christians that Clinton is a satanically inspired rascal who is

capable of anything. The film's biggest public booster has been the Rev. Jerry Falwell, who hawked the film on his nationally broadcast television program, *The Old Time Gospel Hour*. Reportedly, 150,000 copies of the video have been sold.

Matrisciana and his organizational fiefdom function as a covert operation, according to an article by investigative reporter Murray Waas in the Web 'zine *Salon*. Waas writes that many of the allegations raised in *The Clinton Chronicles* and elsewhere are "part of a covert and sophisticated political propaganda effort to influence public opinion against president Clinton." Waas disclosed internal Citizen's For Honest Government financial documents showing that the group paid at least \$200,000 to various "expert witnesses" who are featured in *The Clinton Chronicles*, provided testimony to independent counsel Kenneth Starr, and helped launch investigations by congressional committees and federal agencies.

Where Citizens for Honest Government gets its funding is unknown. However, the group has close ties to Chris Ruddy, the reporter who was fired from *The New York Post* because of his obsession with Foster's suicide. He was subsequently hired by right-wing strategist and philanthropist Richard Mellon

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Scaife, who placed Ruddy on the payroll of the Scaife-owned daily *Pittsburgh Tribune-Review*, where he continues to spin Clinton conspiracy stories. Waas reports that Matrisciana and Ruddy share a bank account. As of September 1997, it contained more than \$3 million. He also writes that "modest payments" have been made from that account to "critics of the president." It is not clear, however, who was the original source of the funds.

Matrisciana told Waas that neither Citizens for Honest Government nor he received any funds from Scaife. This was surprising, since so many others in the constellation of anti-Clinton organizations have been recipients of Scaife's dollars, including *The American Spectator* magazine, which specializes in Clinton scandals. *The American Spectator* and *The Wall Street Journal* have both relied on the Citizens For Honest Government's paid "witnesses" as sources for stories.

More quietly, the *The Clinton Chronicles* are being promoted by the CNP. In September 1994, the group mailed copies of the video to all 500 or so of its members with a cover letter urging them to "pass it on to a friend, relative, business associate, public official or member of the media, [because] as many Americans as possible should become informed about the evil which infests the Clinton Administration."

Founded in 1981 by McDonald and California investor William Cies, the CNP plays a pivotal role in the development of political strategies for the far-right. "When the leadership of the American radical right needs a strategy, chances are very good that the planning will occur in a meeting of the CNP," writes Russ Bellant in *Front Lines Research*. "The meetings of this secretive and little-known organization are often a springboard for radical-right campaigns and long-term planning. But these efforts will seldom be traced to the CNP."

The CNP, which meets quarterly behind closed doors, is so secretive that the group's Washington office will neither confirm nor deny where, or even if, the group meets. CNP members include Sens. Jesse Helms (R-N.C.), Lauch Faircloth (R-N.C.), Don Nickles (R-Okla.) and Trent Lott (R-Miss.), Reps. Dick Armey (R-Texas), Dan Burton (R-Ind.) and Danemeyer, former Attorney General Edwin Meese, Falwell, Pat Robertson, Oliver North, right-wing political strategist Paul Weyrich, and John Whitehead of the Rutherford Institute, which represents Paula Jones.

In the '80s, the CNP helped coordinate conservative movement support for the contras in Nicaragua in cooperation with then National Security Council aide Oliver North. In the '90s, Clinton has taken the place of Daniel Ortega and the role of the contras is being played by the conspiratorial right. As CNP founding father Weyrich once put it: "We are no longer work-

ing to preserve the status quo. We are radicals, working to overturn the present power structure in this country."

Not content with promoting *The Clinton Chronicles* and other forms of disinformation, the CNP has turned to more direct attempts to destabilize the Clinton administration. The Citizens For Honest Government's "impeachment organizers kit" explains that the impeachment resolution introduced by Barr was conceived at "an impeachment panel discussion" during a CNP "Montreal meeting in June [1997] and a follow-up discussion in South Carolina." The resolution itself was introduced in November. While many strands of the anti-Clinton "conspiracy" lead back to the CNP, this disclosure is the first documentation that the CNP has played a central, behind-the-scenes role directing the activities of the Clinton scandal mongers.

"When the radical right needs a strategy, chances are very good that the planning will occur in a meeting of the CNP."

Despite the deluge, Clinton has been exonerated of several major allegations presented in *The Clinton Chronicles*. The House Banking Committee dismissed charges of drug running and cover-up. Special Prosecutor Kenneth Starr said Clinton had no part in Foster's death. And Judge Susan Webber Wright recently threw out Paula Jones' civil suit against the president, saying that whatever Clinton's alleged behavior, it fell far below the standard of sexual harassment. But the allegations in *The Clinton Chronicles* will be carried on like gospel by true believers. In the fevered mind of conspiracy theorists, if a charge doesn't stick, it must be part of the cover-up. Those with a political motive to smear the president will continue to promote the unproven charges, by whatever means necessary.

The conspiracy theories and Christian nationalism of the far-right makes Newt Gingrich and the GOP congressional leadership look moderate by comparison. This plays a vital role in not only animating GOP constituencies, but in giving GOP leadership the opportunity to look like statesmen in their handling of the Clinton scandals.

The institutions of the far right are often portrayed as fringe players. If they are out of sight, they are out of mind to most Americans and most of the media. However, working with great political efficacy, the far-right researched, propagandized, and then raised and spent vast sums to push their allegations against the president into the major arenas of civic discourse: the courts, Congress and the media. But the Right's role in American public life is so underappreciated that even when they stood out in the Georgia sunshine to rally for the impeachment of the president, they remained in the shadows. ■

Frederick Clarkson is the author of *Eternal Hostility: The Struggle Between Theocracy and Democracy* (Common Courage Press). Research for this article was generously supported by Political Research Associates in Boston.

Which Team Are

Does an obsession with sports hurt the black community?

Recently perusing *Black Voices*, a Web site dedicated to news of interest to African-Americans, I noticed that the top five stories highlighted errant Chicago Bear Alonzo Spellman, golf phenom Tiger Woods, disgraced ex-champ Mike Tyson, pious Green Bay Packer Reggie White and Golden State Warrior Latrell Sprewell, who infamously choked his coach. *Black Voices'* heavy focus on black athletes may have been skewed a bit by a coincidence of events. But there is no denying the inordinate prominence of ball players, fist swingers and fast runners in African-American culture.

Last year, golfer Wood's victory in the Masters and the 50th anniversary of Jackie Robinson's desegregation of Major League Baseball catapulted an intense discussion of



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You On?

By Salim Muwakkil

the affect of sports on race relations onto the front pages. This public visibility focused a discussion on the racial dimension of athletics and forced a general realization of extraordinary influence of sports in African-American society.

Confronted historically by the manifold indignities of racist exclusion, blacks have long seen sports as a source of inspiration. In the first half of the century, the success of black boxing champions like Jack Johnson and Joe Louis, Olympic runner Jesse Owens and baseball's Robinson inspired parades and other demonstrations of race pride in African-American communities. "These athletes were refuting the 'Tarzan mentality' that white men could do anything better than blacks," says Alvin Poussaint, a Harvard Medical School psychiatrist. "The sports arena became a battleground against white supremacy." But now, Poussaint warns, "There is an overemphasis on sports in the black community. Too many black students are putting all their eggs in one basket."

A recent poll by Northeastern University's Center for the Study of Sport in Society found that 66 percent of black teenagers in urban centers believe they can earn a living playing sports. This is more than twice the percentage of young whites who hold such beliefs. Black parents also are four-times more likely than white parents to believe that their children are destined for professional sports. Yet, according to Michael Messner, whose 1992 book, *Power at Play*, examines the powerful influence of sports in American culture, a black man has only a 1-in-50,000 chance of going pro.

Blacks are a dominant presence in our three national sports. Even though they make up only 13 percent of the U.S. population, a little more than 80 percent of National Basketball Association (NBA) players, 67 percent of the players in the National Football League (NFL) and 17 percent of Major League Baseball (MLB) players are black.

Yet even in these integrated workplaces, African-Americans are disproportionately shut out of the front offices. According to a survey by the Center for the Study of Sport in Society, African-Americans make up 20 percent of NBA, 21 percent of NFL and 15 percent of MLB management. "Despite well-intentioned efforts for diversity, white males still control most of our teams, front offices and athletic departments," says the center's director, Richard Lapchick.

The huge amount of money that sports superstars earn has brought the black athlete to "the top of the prestige order," says Harry Edwards, a sociologist at the University of California-Berkeley. The average annual salary in the NBA is \$2 million, in the NFL it's \$767,000, and in MLB it's \$1.1 million. With celebrity endorsements, stars like Michael Jordan and Shaquille O'Neal earn as much as \$50 million a year.

Is it any wonder so many young people want, as the

Gatorade commercial puts it, to "be like Mike"? Indeed, dark-skinned Jordan's cultural omnipresence is a sign not only of how prominent sports have become in American life, but also of how corporations socialize the nation's youth. Sports metaphors now flavor our contemporary lexicon ("three-strikes," "level playing field," "slam dunk"), influence our vernacular gestures (high-fives, end-zone dances) and dictate our apparel (baseball caps, starter jackets, sneakers).

But contrary to popular opinion, Jordan's wide acceptance is not necessarily the herald of a coming color-blindness in society or even of racial progress. The integration of sports is appealing because it promises better race relations through entertainment. But while blacks are generating billions of dollars in revenue, very little of that money filters down to the impoverished black communities where many pros start playing the game.

When media images of rich and famous black athletes are contrasted with the despair, crime and poverty that characterize too many African-American communities, is it any wonder that so many young blacks harbor "Hoop Dreams"? Most analysts agree that black youth's intense focus on athletics is socially perverse. While the civil rights struggle has forced open many more employment opportunities, African-American youth are too preoccupied with sports to utilize their expanded options. Indeed, those who wish to get ahead in other occupations often pay a high price. Tales of academically successful black students being accused of "acting white" and then being ostracized by their peers are legion.

Author John Hoberman argues that black leaders and intellectuals are downplaying a crisis. "The cult of black athleticism is emblematic of an entire complex of black problems, which includes the adolescent violence and academic failure that have come to symbolize the black male for most Americans," Hoberman writes in his 1997 book, *Darwin's Athletes: How Sport Has Damaged Black America and Preserved the Myth of Race*. Hoberman, a professor of Germanic Studies at the University of Texas, argues provocatively that the success of black athletes diverts the attention of African-American youth from academics to the playground.

"The whole problem here," he writes, "is that the black middle class is rendered essentially invisible by the parade of black athletes and criminals on television." This public visibility merely reinforces the notion—among blacks as well as whites—that African-Americans have physical gifts but lack mental capacity. The image of black male athletes as over-sexed and feral, with violent tendencies just barely held in check by the rigors of athletic discipline, is a view that has its roots in slavery. But Hoberman says that it has become a racist tradition. Hoberman understands the compensatory motive dri-



While black athletes generate billions in revenue, very little money trickles down to the impoverished black communities where many pros started playing the game.

ving some blacks to promote the superjock stereotype, but he is less forgiving of black intellectuals. While they readily condemn other forms of cultural exploitation, he writes, they "see stylish black athleticism as a kind of cultural avant-garde."

Darwin's Athletes stirred up quite a controversy. Hoberman's slash-and-burn prose style is partly to blame, but he's also a white author writing unsentimentally—and at times scathingly—about African-American culture. His critics say he gives too much credit to notions long debunked. They argue that ideas of savage blacks threatening cerebral whites have been relegated to the dust bin of history.

Kenneth Shropshire wrote extensively about this subject in his 1997 book, *In Black and White: Race and Sports in America*. He characterizes Hoberman's efforts as part of the "multifaceted projected view of white intellectual superiority." Writing in *Sports Based Press*, an online "journal of the African-American athlete," Shropshire observes that Hoberman is so intent on constructing formulaic assessments, he misses the point "that many African-Americans, like whites, participate in sports not for some 'Hoop Dream' of pro success but for a simple love of the game. And at another level, sports serve as a vehicle or means of entering into a lucrative profession." Shropshire argues that Hoberman's book merely manifests white fears of black athletic domination.

In truth, the fact that African-American athletes dedicate themselves to sports is no more problematic than when whites do. White girls starve themselves for figure skating, ballet and gymnastics. Their ice/stage/beam dreams are no less pathological than the dreams of black boys to play in the NBA. The same may be said of fanatical little leaguers (and their parents) buzzing about suburbia or the children of the now-famous "soccer moms." In short, black Americans' infatuation with sports is just part of a national romance.

Darwin's Athletes raises important issues. For example, Hoberman argues that the political apathy and oblivious individualism of most professional athletes are programmed by the

structure of professional sports. Why else are current black athletes so apolitical? Why, given their huge salaries and numerical advantage, don't black pro football players like Emmitt Smith, Deion Sanders and Jerry Rice flex their considerable muscle and agitate for more black coaches and owners in the NFL, which has had just four black head coaches in its entire history? Why don't Michael Jordan and Shaquille O'Neal (whose combined salaries outstrip the GNP of some developing countries) create enterprises or foundations to help better conditions in black communities? "Arthur Ashe answered one such question by correctly asserting that advertisers want somebody who's politically neutered," Hoberman writes. "That black athletes have been willing to conform to this standard is borne out by their conspicuous political quiescence."

Hoberman's arguments echo those made by many black critics of professional athletics, including Malcolm X, who in the early '60s regularly condemned the "sport and play" mentality encouraged by pro sports. His successors in the black power era cast black athletes as court jesters hired to entertain the white masses. When Tommie Smith and John Carlos raised their fists in the black power salute on the victory stand at the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City, they broke from that jester role and were widely applauded by the militant black youth of the era. Since then, the sentiments symbolized by that action have faded badly.

Thirty years later, the black athlete remains largely divorced from the struggles of African-Americans and ever more under the yoke of corporate America. But contemporary analysts of sports and African-American culture are less damning of black athletes than they were in the past. This revisionist critique ascribes more agency to black players than previous analyses, which often portrayed black athletes as little more than hapless flotsam tossed about by social forces.

African-Americans are not hapless victims of history, but they have been victimized by historical forces. Ignoring those patterns does little to eliminate them, and books like *Darwin's Athletes* help to add clarity and context. If African-Americans are to exploit the socio-economic options opened by varied civil rights struggles more fully, blacks must reduce the disproportionate allure of sports in their communities. Black leadership must contextualize athletic success by promoting other avenues to social status, intensifying the struggle for access to those avenues and better educating youth about those potholes on the road to the stadium.

Can I get a high-five on that? ■

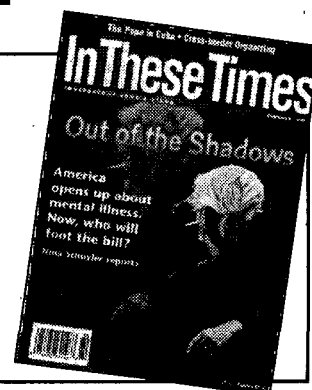
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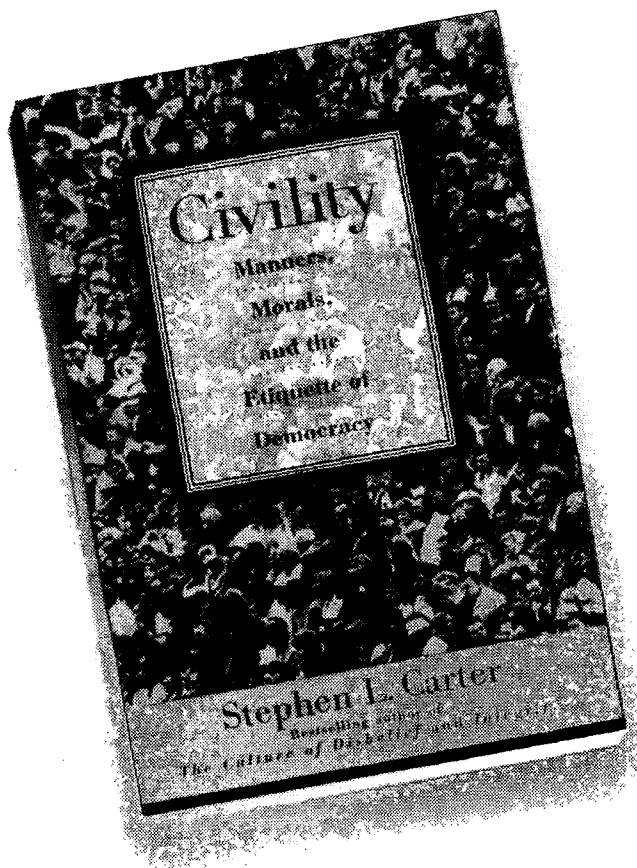


A Prayer for Civility

Civility: Manners, Morals, and the Etiquette of Democracy

By Stephen L. Carter
Basic Books
352 pages, \$25

REVIEWED BY JEAN BETHKE ELSHTAIN



At dinner not long ago with a faculty member who had hosted me on a visit to his campus, I happened to glance at a table-for-two tucked into a nearby corner of the restaurant. This is what I saw: A couple, husband and wife to judge by the wedding bands, were eating a meal. She was wonderfully dressed, apparently having anticipated this evening out all week. But she looked none too happy. Indeed, she was downright glum, staring into her plate and, from time to time, managing a bite. And her partner, what was he up to? Why, talking on his cell phone, upbraiding a subordinate for not having been "on top" of some situation or another. Such is the culture we live in today, Stephen Carter argues in *Civility*. Rather than showing "genuine respect for others"—even spouses and friends—we treat one another rudely and carelessly, as grist for the mill rather than as ends in themselves.

Carter, a Yale University law professor, approaches his theme prayerfully—offering "a prayer for understanding and for our strength, as a nation, to build a society in which we act with, rather than

talk about, genuine respect for others." He proposes to "investigate ... both our yearning for and our inability to achieve a society marked by true civility." His book tries to balance "a discussion of philosophy and theology with examples drawn from law, politics and everyday life." And Carter means it when he says the book is a form of prayer. His concluding word is "Amen."

So it seems best to approach *Civility* as a civic sermon and to imagine Carter in the pulpit. For thousands of American citizens, he will be preaching to the choir. For they, too, have long lamented the coarseness and harshness of much of what goes on between us. The evidence is everywhere. The shock one sustains when a fresh-faced little girl in pigtails tells her playmate to "F--- off!" The dreary, salacious monotony of daytime talk shows, where every manner human behavior—pathological, aberrant, brutal, reckless, feckless or just plain stupid—is paraded before us daily.

Carter says we've lost the ability to "sacrifice" for the good of the whole; that we've all become like the "Selfish

Passenger" who tore past security at the Houston airport because he was running late, thereby shutting down the entire terminal. One man discombobulated thousands of fellow passengers because he had to get somewhere in a hurry.

Civility, Carter argues, is the many sacrifices "we are called to make for the sake of living together." We do this not just to make things easier and make everything run smoothly, but because this is the way to signal respect, marking our fellow citizens as "full equals, both before the law and before God." Every functioning community, without exception, requires rules of behavior, he says. And, all other things being equal, we must follow those rules. Otherwise, we fall into the world of violent self-help depicted by Thomas Hobbes—life becomes nasty, brutish and short. Actually, given the wonders of modern medicine, Carter suggests, life is likely to become nasty, brutish and long. That may be worse.

So what went wrong? Why the disintegration in decency? Carter's answer, one that deserves more fleshing-out than he provides in this book, is that the

values of the market and of a 'marketized' political life—amoral consequentialism, one might call it—have increasingly crowded out those values represented by "family, religion and the common school." It isn't news that American families have taken a huge hit over the past several decades. Every indicator—divorce, soaring teen pregnancy, violence, abuse—is up. The indications of family breakdown track precisely with other by-now-familiar troubles, like the teen suicide rate, which has tripled since 1960. Teen child-bearing alone is a huge problem. The U.S. has the highest rate of unmarried teen pregnancy in the developed world, and these mothers and their children rarely flourish, independent of their race or socio-economic status.

Yet somehow, those who try to address such problems directly—who argue that these are concerns for the entire society—are branded by others as "uncivil." That's unfair: The real breakdown in civility is a culture that tolerates putting so many babies in a danger zone. As Carter argues, only the recovery of a "sacrificial ethic" will help restore balance to our cultural life. But

it is less clear to me how such an ethic is to be embodied robustly when the very institutions that were its historic "home" have collapsed. Absent a sense that "we're in it together," calls to sacrifice, for all the reasons Carter points out, are likely to fall on sullen and uncomprehending ears.

Carter wants to expand democratic dialogue and debate and sees civility as a precondition. Civility just means we treat those with whom we disagree as opponents, not enemies. And we do this whether we like the people we are in the arena with or not.

Throughout his book, Carter offers up rules of civility—they are all summarized at book's end—that constitute a paean to basic civic common sense. It would be hard, indeed it would seem churlish, to take exception to any of them. But I wonder if we haven't passed the point of no return. So much of what Carter relies upon to revivify civility—a sense of civic responsibility and preparedness to sacrifice in order to attain a good we cannot know alone; openness to criticize and to criticism; a commitment to civic argument and reasoning; a

For Carter, civility just means we treat those with whom we disagree as opponents, not as enemies.

reconsideration of what we mean by tolerance, for tolerance is not about "anything goes with impunity"; a revitalization and rescue of our public schools; an insistence that deeply fraught moral questions, like abortion, be settled by democratic debate and compromise instead of by judicial fiat—seems every day more elusive.

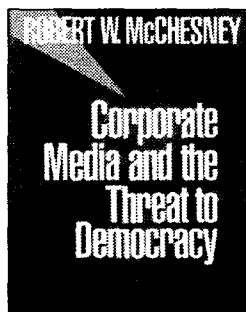
This is especially true in light of the fact that it seems impossible for an American to be shamed anymore. Carter wants a world in which ordinary citizens and public officials are ashamed when they violate private and public trust. But consider the despicable Dick Morris, President Clinton's former right-hand man. Shamed for consorting with a high-priced call girl and boasting of his presidential intimacy, he leaves his White House position in disgrace. Except that immediately afterwards he pops up on the covers of *Time* and *Newsweek*. Suddenly, he is a pundit, blithering witlessly about the President's legacy. He is writing a tell-all book for a huge advance. He is going on *Larry King Live*. Next thing you know, he's back in the White House, dishing out more advice to the president. What do you have to do to be shamed today?

Carter suggests that a world without shame is a world in civic free-fall. Unfortunately, his generous vision of a robust, decent, plural, civil democracy is, therefore, even more remote than he thinks. But then, as a Christian, Carter is called to hope. His book is a monument to hopefulness. ■

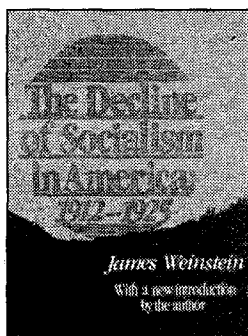
Jean Bethke Elshtain is Laura Spelman Rockefeller Professor of Social and Political Ethics at the University of Chicago.

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The New Deal Majority

Liberalism and its Discontents

By Alan Brinkley

Harvard University Press

372 pages, \$27.95

REVIEWED BY RICK PERLSTEIN



If you read much on politics, you've noticed the trend: a bushelful of books, all published in the last few years, whose déjà-vu covers (*The New Majority: Toward a Popular Progressive Politics*; *Middle Class Dreams: The Politics and Power of the New American Majority*) open to reveal interlocking acknowledgments (Robert Borosage, Theda Skocpol, Paul Starr, Ruy Teixeira, Stanley Greenberg, Jeff Faux) and the same nifty little argument—that a politically untapped mass of citizens, burned by turbocharged capitalism, can be won over to a robust program of progressive government activism by pushing the very same rhetorical buttons of home, hearth and happiness exploited so conspicuously by the present Republican putschists.

If you don't read much on politics, you haven't heard of these people. As political interventionists, the New Majoritarians are washouts: They have yet to produce a candidate for national office, let alone realign the Democratic party to their view of things. Part of the reason is simple politics: No one with power right now pays a whit of atten-

tion to anything left of the Democratic Leadership Council. Partly, though, it's their own doing. Consider their tacit battle cry: "We're right! Just look at the numbers!"

Numbers, schnumbers. Great realignments of political power are never effected in a mass electoral democracy without tapping some pretty elemental

passions within the electorate. The New Majoritarians' talk of structural transformations, declining real incomes and the impact of the rights revolution on the Democratic coalition is riveting to those (like me) who twig to that sort of thing, but just doesn't cut it with most voters. They are right. But that's not enough.

All is not lost though. The very sobriety that unsuits them as standard bearers for a populist political charge makes the New Majoritarians outstanding interpreters of today's political scene. They offer, if not shots heard 'round the world, some of the most trenchant and readable political essay-writing to be published in decades. Read them well, and you come away with a fuller sense of what's really going on in America than from any dozen carping culture warriors.

Alan Brinkley of Columbia University is their historian. His essays over the past fifteen years, collected in *Liberalism and its Discontents*, are learned, calm and artful. Brinkley betrays real indignation throughout—as any unashamed liberal faced with the task of explaining the last 65 years of American history

Brinkley betrays real indignation throughout—as any unashamed liberal faced with the task of explaining the last 65 years of American history must—but his is a quiet anger.

WOMEN on the DEFENSIVE

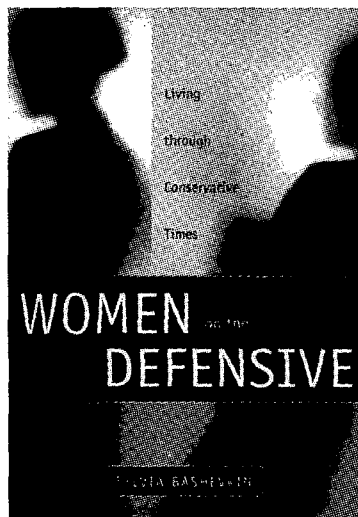
Living through
Conservative Times

SYLVIA BASHEVKIN

Where have the vibrant women's movements of the 1960s and 1970s gone? Is the feminist struggle for equality over or only temporarily muffled? Many believe that the "backlash" of the 1980s sounded a death knell for contemporary feminism, but *Women on the Defensive* paints a much more rich and complex picture of the greatly exaggerated reports of feminism's death.

"We now know, in remarkable detail and with fine analysis, not only about the rise of movements for women's empowerment but also about the rise of movements to maintain traditional roles. Bashevkin's work sets the standard for this new and fuller understanding of women's political movements."

—Barbara J. Nelson, coeditor of
Women and Politics Worldwide



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must—but his is a quiet anger. Analyzing Franklin D. Roosevelt's attack on "economic royalists" and "malefactors of great wealth" in his 1937 inaugural address, Brinkley writes: "That language—a language only rarely dominant, and more rarely decisive even within the New Deal itself—has since become almost entirely lost to American politics, even though the problems it attempted to address—the problems associated with highly concentrated economic power and widening disparities of wealth and income—have survived."

This typically New Majoritarian weakness as pamphleteer helps to make Brinkley one of the most trenchant, fair-minded and illuminating historical essayists of his generation, and makes this book indispensable to anyone seeking to understand one of the signal political questions of our age: What is New Deal liberalism, and where did it go?

Legions of critics and boosters once thought they knew. New Deal liberalism was an incoherent mess, collapsing under its own internal contradictions. No one seemed to be a better judge of this than Raymond Moley, who observed the New Deal from the inside as one of FDR's original "brain trusters," and later helped along its demise as a virulently conservative *Newsweek* columnist. In his 1939 memoir, Moley wrote: "To look upon these programs as the result of a unified plan was to believe that the accumulation of stuffed snakes, baseball pictures, school flags, old tennis shoes, carpenter's tools, geometry books and chemistry sets in a boy's bedroom could have been put there by an interior decorator." To which he might have added: To think the New Deal defensible was to believe the brat would ever clean his room.

Brinkley, however, doesn't think that New Deal liberalism was laid low by its messiness. In his 1995 book, *The End of Reform: New Deal Liberalism in Recession and War* (and four chapters of this volume), he demonstrates liberalism's unmistakable, fateful coherence. The early New Deal, he argues, was certainly jumbled—mirroring, in part, Roosevelt's own divided soul. Major internal debate—between, for

instance, those favoring broad-based government intervention into the economy and those who came to prefer managing it with the light touch of Keynesian fiscal policy, mopping up what privation remained through modest welfare provisions and social insurance—divided the New Deal liberals through Roosevelt's first term. But by 1938, a brutal recession and a hostile Supreme Court scotched the interven-

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tionist schemes of the early New Deal—none more ruthlessly than the ones for which Brinkley shows an unfashionable sympathy: state efforts to better coordinate the productive powers of industry and to mobilize the unemployed in wide-ranging public works. From that point on, the liberal position cohered around the Keynesian, managerial model. The "economic question" presumed solved, liberals moved on to other worthy pursuits, civil rights pre-eminent among them.

In this new collection, Brinkley abets the argument about liberalism in *The End of Reform* with a parallel one about its discontents. The "economic question" wasn't solved, he points out, and the liberalism that emerged from the Depression and World War II contained a tragic flaw. The little public investment allowed was either disguised (the military-industrial complex, proof positive that Big Government can heal an ailing economy), explained away (Social Security, which pretends not to

be a public investment at all), or ill-conceived (Aid to Families with Dependent Children, which assumed that since able-bodied men could always be able to earn enough to keep their wives at home, the state should provide aid only to families where fathers were absent).

Thus, the liberalism we know evolved into an elegant contraption guaranteed to produce unhappy citizens, be they left, right or in-between. The essays in the second half of *Liberalism and Its Discontents* include sympathetic and moving case studies of some of the malcontents. We are introduced to discontented liberals—like Allard Lowenstein, who watched, anguished, as liberal idealism was swallowed by the post-1967 New Left, which itself receives a sympathetic portrait; and Richard Hofstadter, who watched, anguished, as the American reform tradition's will was wrecked by McCarthyism. We meet those discontented by liberals—like Oral Roberts, whose followers found Pentecostalism a far more worthy guarantor of prosperity than the federal government. And then there are those discontented by politics entirely—like the two major parties, whose neutered national conventions are the subject of the book's most entertaining chapter.

The essay on Roberts is a masterpiece. According to Brinkley, what the faith healer from Tulsa really ministered to was his flock's middle-class dreams. Roberts came to prominence in the '50s as the voice of those backwoods charismatic Southern Christians who went through World War II, blinked, and found themselves in a cauldron of economic revitalization and cultural change. Roberts became a Professor Henry Higgins of the Pentecostals, schooling these left-behinds in how to make their way in a new world without losing their souls. "At Oral Roberts University," Brinkley reports, "aerobic weight-loss programs were required, and the chronically obese could be expelled. Women were encouraged to wear makeup and fashionable clothes." They would go forth and win the secularized suburbs for Jesus—though Brinkley wonders whether the secularized suburbs didn't end up winning them. Around the time he published his

1989 book *How I Learned Jesus Was Not Poor*, Roberts purged the folk associations of his flock altogether by becoming a Methodist.

Of course, winning those souls left behind by modernity for the middle class was FDR's goal as well. How did millions of people come to find preachers more worthy guarantors of prosperity than politicians? Brinkley approaches the question only obliquely. Though he led the way among historians in insisting that the American Right should be a serious object of scholarly attention with his 1983 volume *Voices of Protest: Huey Long, Father Coughlin, and the Great Depression*, he can't really be considered an expert on postwar conservatism. (He even misspells the name of its doyenne, Phyllis Schlafly.) Indeed, Brinkley the historian of New Deal America raises looming questions that Brinkley the essayist of postwar America does not even recognize. If the New Deal left behind as its legacy a "weak and embattled" state, then why did so many Americans come to experience it as a looming Leviathan? And, if the New Deal lav-

ished so much productive attention on the region that would come to be called "the Sunbelt," why was so much of the reaction centered there?

I have some ideas, which I'll keep a trade secret for now. But I'll tell you this: I wouldn't be able to argue what I plan to argue in my own book on the end of New Deal liberalism without Alan Brinkley's insights on its rise. What's more, two of the most promising forthcoming studies on the subject—Lisa McGirr on Orange County conservatism and Matthew Dalleck on Ronald Reagan's 1966 gubernatorial race—owe Brinkley a more direct debt: Both began as Columbia University dissertations under his supervision.

Neither Brinkley nor his students will ever send the masses to the barricades. They will only give us the kind of history worth reading while we wait and work for the next new majority to arise. In the Era of Gingrich, that may not be achievement enough. But in the Age of Gossip, it will have to do. ■

Rick Perlstein, a contributing editor of *Lingua Franca*, is writing a book about the 1964 Barry Goldwater campaign.

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—Douglas Brinkley, Director,
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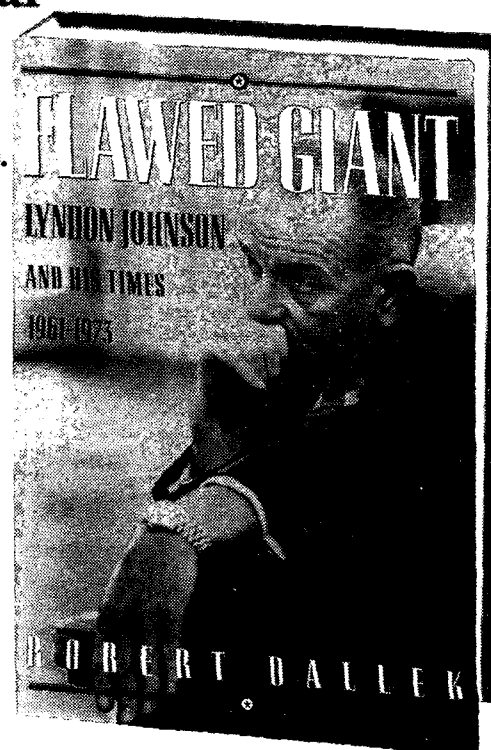
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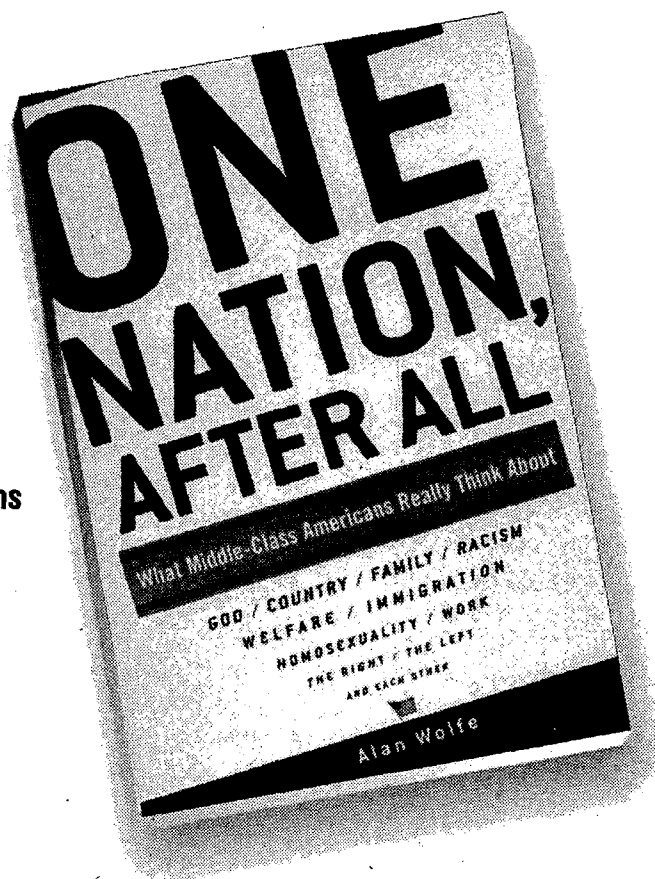
One Nation, After All: What Middle-Class Americans Really Think About God, Country, Family, Racism, Welfare, Immigration, Homosexuality, Work, The Right, The Left and Each Other

By Alan Wolfe

Viking

359 pages, \$24.95

REVIEWED BY ALEX LICHTENSTEIN



One has to be suspicious of a book graced with dustjacket praise from both conservative family values maven William Bennett and liberal Minnesota Sen. Paul Wellstone. Ironically, Alan Wolfe's new survey of the attitudes of what he calls "middle-class Americans" offers little ammunition for either one. Indeed, Wolfe maintains that the sharply defined lines of battle—over race, gender, "family values," church and state, multiculturalism, immigration and so on—that appear in the media reflect the positions of the punditocracy more than those of ordinary Americans.

Why not "let the silent majority speak" for itself? In order to write *One Nation After All*, Wolfe put together something called the "Middle Class Morality Project." He interviewed 200 middle-class Americans in a search for America's ever-elusive "public morality." His results refute the image of a nation wracked by "culture wars" that pit traditionalists against modernists, believers in the verities of family, god, and country against cosmopolitans who embrace an ethic of personal freedom unencumbered by fixed moral values. Instead, Wolfe

argues, Americans share a core of moderate, tolerant values—some of which this erstwhile Marxist sociologist appears to embrace. Wolfe admits that through this project he "was coming to terms with the rejection of suburbia" that he and many other New Left intellectuals once wore on their sleeves.

Wolfe's method, it must be said, is somewhat peculiar. Acknowledging the fuzziness of both objective and subjective definitions of "middle class," he settles on social geography as the common variable. Wolfe and a research assistant chose eight suburban communities in their search for the middle class. They range from Brookline, Mass., the quintessential roost of Robert Reich's "symbolic analysts," and DeKalb County, Ga., haven of Atlanta's growing black middle class, to the heartland community of Broken Arrow, Okla., outside of Tulsa, and the "private" retirement suburb of Rancho Bernardo, Calif. These places have little in common either culturally or ideologically, which is precisely Wolfe's point.

In the aggregate, Wolfe's 200 middle-class families have some striking char-

acteristics. For example, fully one-third describe their party affiliation as "independent," suggesting that neither dominant party speaks for them. The group is heterogeneous in terms of education level (some 41.5 percent do not have a college degree) and relationship to the economy (39.5 percent are defined as "professional/managerial"). But this information makes it very hard to know who these people really are.

Even more disquieting, Wolfe's "discovery" of a set of values common to all these communities is based on 90-minute interviews. Anyone who has conducted oral history or ethnographic field work knows that such brief encounters precipitate only the most shallow responses, hardly permitting one to "get underneath and around sound bites and bumper sticker slogans." Many of the quotes dished up by participants are kitchen-table, common-sense banalities.

Wolfe asked his subjects about "racial and economic justice, the family, religion, obligations to the country, work and civic participation." Their responses are grouped together so that each hot-

button topic has its own chapter. Starting with religion, Wolfe found that the middle class maintains a commitment to deep religious belief, yet one tempered by a tolerant pluralism. Absolutism, fanaticism, and fundamentalism are rare. As for "family values," the middle class appears ambivalent, torn between a nostalgic longing for the patriarchal family and admiring the flexibilities necessary to live a modern life. Few support making "postmodern" family ideals like gay marriage and parenting equally viable alternatives.

Indeed, Wolfe's participants displayed an unsolicited and fervent condemnation of homosexuality in any form. But even here, where "the line separating gay America from straight America" seems firmly drawn, many of Wolfe's subjects are reluctant to move from moral condemnation to outright suppression. This "don't ask, don't tell" attitude means the closet will likely remain only half-open: The "Gay Moment" heralded a few years ago by the late Andrew Kopkind has yet to transform bedrock attitudes.

On the explosive matters of welfare, poverty and race, Wolfe finds less correlation between racial fear and suburban views of welfare and poverty than left-liberal intellectuals tend to claim. In part, this is because middle-class blacks exhibited an even greater hostility to the inner-city black poor than do suburban whites. Wolfe concludes that middle-class Americans, black and white, support the principle of a safety net, but they dislike any welfare system that leads to long-term dependency or is predicated on a notion of welfare rights without obligations. In short, middle-class morality continues to distinguish between the deserving and undeserving poor, but not, Wolfe argues, in a way that is so deeply rooted in notions of race and gender as the left likes to think. Moreover, while adamantly opposed to bilingualism, many of his respondents were open to immigration and a "benign multiculturalism."

Thus what was once a "silent majority," driven by the politics of resentment, appears to have become a "reasonable majority," embracing values "capacious enough to be inclusive

but demanding enough to uphold standards of personal responsibility." This is a profoundly optimistic view. Unlike the jeremiads of the late Christopher Lasch, who bemoaned the destruction of "petty bourgeois" values by the liberal, technocratic state, Wolfe maintains that those values are preserved in churches, homes, schools and suburban communities around the country.

At the same time—and unlike antagonists in the "culture wars"—Wolfe sees traditionalists and modernists approaching one another, not moving ever farther apart. Traditionalists, he argues, have "incorporated into their lives some of the social transformations ... associated with the 1960s." Modernists, meanwhile, "criticize middle-class morality [but] find it relatively easy to live by its tenets." True, the "reasonable majority" still wants to root morality in a world "above politics," seeking transcendent and universal values in the Bible, the Constitution and traditional codes of behavior. But Wolfe claims that this desire has been tempered by a deep strain of tolerance and realism: We are

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all moral relativists now. Wolfe's project uncovers an essential moral pragmatism. This no doubt drives traditionalists on the right to distraction, but the left might hesitate to embrace it as well, since it lacks social commitment.

Wolfe batters conservative "intellectuals" like Irving Kristol for their absurd longing for traditionalism and their ludicrous prescriptions for moral renewal that ignore how ordinary Americans live. He reminds the Right that free market capitalism, not the permissive values

of the Left, is "responsible for the moral anarchy" they ceaselessly bemoan. The Left, however, also wants it both ways, by championing personal autonomy in the realm of identity but calling for public checks on behavior in the marketplace.

Wolfe's waning attachment to the post-'60s Left shows through in his critique of growing income inequality. But he so prefers the pragmatism and "modern traditionalism" of the middle class to the moral absolutism of politicized intellectuals, that Wolfe imagines moral equanimity can translate into a commitment to economic equality. Though he chides his respondents for a "romantic nostalgia" that limits their political horizons, Wolfe concludes that their ideological consensus can help "make the United States the one nation economically it already is morally." Applying middle-class morality to questions of political economy, he argues, generates a vision of a "balanced capitalism" where corporations permit people to meet personal and family obligations and corporate executives are not compensated like kings.

But the will to tame the forces that have increased capital mobility, accelerated work and exacerbated economic inequality requires a political vision inaccessible to those operating within the framework of "morality writ small." Deep distrust of the government, the lack of a universal vision of economic justice and disengagement from organized politics make middle-class morality a weak instrument for fighting inequality. Like a growing number of intellectuals—Todd Gitlin and Richard Rorty come to mind—Wolfe would like the Left to abandon the politics of cultural fragmentation and resurrect the New Deal's universal aspirations of economic equality. Recall, though, that this political vision emanated from the factories and fields and found expression in the mobilization of the organized working class. If such a movement should recur, many of the folks from *One Nation After All* will likely end up on the other side. ■

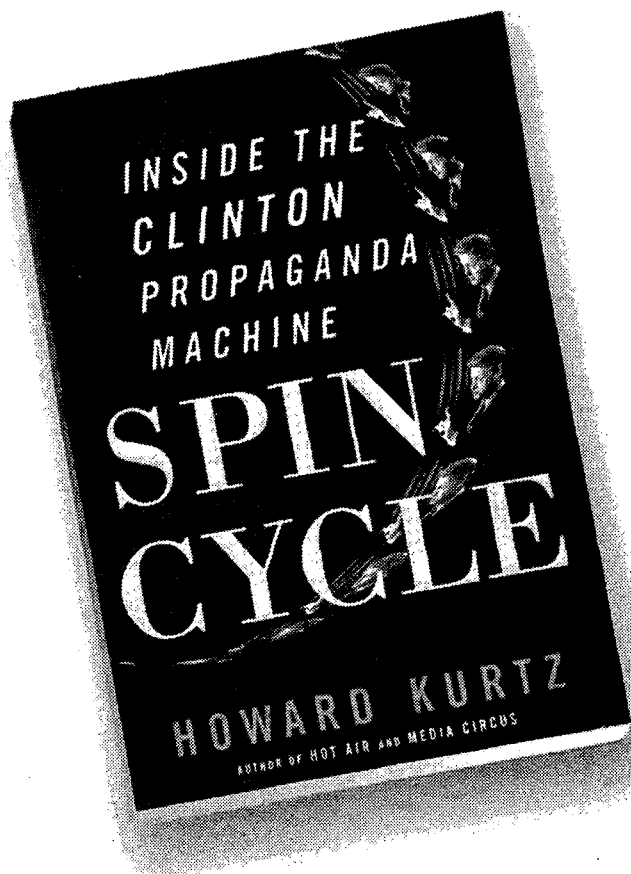
Alex Lichtenstein teaches American history at Florida International University in Miami.

Stroke, Spin, Stonewall, Smear

Spin Cycle:
Inside the Clinton Propaganda Machine

By Howard Kurtz
The Free Press
324 pages, \$25

REVIEWED BY DOUG IRELAND



If you want to know how, nearly midway through his second term, Bill Clinton has managed to preserve his record-high standing in the polls—despite an endless series of hydra-headed scandals involving corruption and abuse of power—you’ll want to read this book. Howard Kurtz, the media reporter for the *Washington Post*, chronicles a year in the life of White House mass media manipulation in *Spin Cycle*. And while there’s little in his account that would surprise Beltway journalists or full-time news junkies, most news consumers will be appalled by the cynical tergiversations that produce what they see and read.

The Clintonoid strategy for taming the press rests on what one might call the four S’s: Stroke, Spin, Stonewall and Smear. Or, as Kurtz puts it, the illusion that “the country was doing just fine on [Clinton’s] watch” was produced by “a carefully honed media strategy—alternately seducing, misleading and sometimes intimidating the press” that allowed the president’s familiars to “project their preferred image on the vast screen of the media

establishment.” Kurtz describes in some detail how White House press operatives managed to “launder the news—to scrub it of dark scandal stains, remove unsightly splotches of controversy, erase greasy dabs of contradictions, and present it to the country crisp and sparkling white. The underlying garment was the same, but it was often unrecognizable.”

Spin Cycle begins in the waning days of 1996 and finishes at the end of 1997. (A hurriedly tacked-on epilogue about the Monica Lewinsky mess was written too early in the scandal to be substantive.) That was, of course, still the year of Donorgate, a selling of the presidency to Corporate America on a scale unrivaled since Richard Nixon’s imperial presidency. Kurtz tells us how Clinton employed the four S’s en route to a public relations triumph.

Stroke: Kurtz lifts the veil on some of the incestuous relationships between big-foot Washington journalists and the White House they’re supposed to be covering—from Clinton’s private dinners at Washington restaurants with the

likes of Cokie and Steve Roberts to the late-night socializing of spin-meister Rahm Emanuel, the former specialist in “opposition research” who is now the president’s chief counselor on domestic policy. Mike McCurry, a former corporate flack (he used to trumpet the virtues of the National Pork Producers Council), who is now Clinton’s press secretary, arranged these off-the-record encounters. After one such presidential strokefest—a get together in the Oval Office dining room with *Newsweek*’s Jonathan Alter, *Slate*’s Jacob Weisberg and the *Wall Street Journal*’s Gerald Seib—the harvest was rich. Alter hailed the president as “the salesman with the best understanding of women” (a hilarious characterization in light of the recent chronicles of the First Fly), and Seib and Weisberg produced similar gush—all without informing their readers of their presidential tête-a-tête. Hobnobbing with the Prez is heady stuff: As *Washington Post* columnist Courtland Milloy wrote candidly about one such session for black journalists, “I could feel the wool being pulled over my eyes. And it felt good, too.”

Even the august *New York Times* succumbed to the blandishments. A secret dinner Dick Morris held at the Jefferson Hotel (the site of the presidential triangulator's toe-sucking trysts) with the *Times*' executive editor, Joe Lelyveld, produced an exclusive interview for the paper. Morris later fed questions to the *Times*' Todd Purdum, who dutifully followed the script as Clinton "knocked them out of the park." No wonder the late, great I.F. Stone used to counsel journalists never to socialize with their subjects.

Spin: One of the most successful tactics the Clintonoids used to contain the Donorgate scandal was the "document dump." This consisted of pre-releasing documents that had already been obtained by Congressional subpoena and would eventually become public—so that, by the time Sen. Fred Thompson (R-Tenn.) got his campaign finance investigation under way, the White House could dismiss their damning confirmations of crass access-selling as "old news." And by leaking upcoming presidential speeches to favored reporters, the Clinton's spinners produced a spate of positive, page-one stories for even the most insubstantial of the poll-driven, small-bore initiatives crafted by Morris and Emanuel. The White House managed to make one-day coverage stretch over three days, following the old PR dictum: "Tell 'em what you're going to tell 'em, then tell 'em, then tell 'em what you've told 'em."

McCurry and Emanuel are also the masters of negative spin. Example: *Boston Globe* reporter Michael Kranish's discovery of a memo from now-indicted Clinton funny-money collector John Huang arguing that Asian Americans scheduled to contribute \$1.1 million at a fund-raiser wanted to preserve the "sibling preference" in immigration law that allowed Asian-Americans to bring their brothers and sisters to the United States. As a result, the Clinton administration did a complete flip-flop, dropping its opposition to the preference. While this was the first time a reporter had tied Asian money to an actual Clinton policy, the White House spin doctors denounced the story as "bullshit" and attacked Kranish for

"misreporting," even though they never challenged the facts in his story. The result: "The big newspapers and the networks all decided to pass on the John Huang memo," Kurtz writes. "Other than a CNN segment and a couple of wire service reports, the story didn't even exist. They had killed it."

Stonewall: From their denial that the White House fat-cat coffees were fund-raisers or that the Lincoln Bedroom was regularly rented to contributors, to their laughable assertions that the fund-raiser at the now-famous California Buddhist Temple was merely a "community outreach" meeting, Clinton and company have frequently pretended that black was white. Their stonewalling has regularly been denounced by the editorial pages of both the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, newspapers that supported Clinton's bids for election and re-election.

Often this reduces White House press briefings to the theater of the absurd, as it did in the wake of James Carville's first appearance on *Meet the Press* in 1996 to attack Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr. Asked if the Ragin' Cajun's attack on Starr had the approval of the president, McCurry responded, "That clearly would be wrong for anyone to draw any inference that the president meant to imply." McCurry used "language so tortured," Kurtz writes, "that the [press] room broke into laughter." Adds Kurtz:

The Carville episode was a perfect example of why journalists had come to view much of what McCurry said with extreme skepticism. To argue, with a straight face, that the president's pal was attacking the president's prosecutor and the president had no way of stopping him ... well, it was hard to watch a grown man twist himself into a pretzel. And for reporters to listen to this sort of drivel day after day was an exercise in frustration.

Smeat: A memo from the Democratic National Committee at the height of Donorgate to anyone caught up in the web of scandal gave instructions that, when all else failed, one should "impugn the source." That's been the

Washington Post columnist Courtland Milloy wrote candidly about one such meeting. "I could feel the wool being pulled over my eyes. And it felt good too."

standard White House response to many damaging revelations.

The White House "war against Kenneth Starr," writes Kurtz, "was a curious and covert operation," and the book provides only a partial guide to its workings. But *Spin Cycle* shows how the Clintonoids, when not rewarding friendly reporters with leaks and exclusive interviews, tried to punish anyone whose independence and aggressive pursuit of stories irritated Bill or Hillary. The attempt to smear Susan Schmidt, a fine *Washington Post* reporter (an operation dreamed up by journalist/courtier Sidney Blumenthal and ordered by Hillary) got national attention when the *Post* ran an excerpt from *Spin Cycle*.

But this sort of thing is standard operating procedure at the White House. When ABC's Chris Vlasto put together a piece on Whitewater for *World News Tonight*, McCurry called him, threatening that "you're never gonna work in this town again." Then McCurry called Vlasto's boss. When the *Baltimore Sun*'s Carl Cannon—a respected reporter whose father, Lou, covered the Reagan White House—wrote an article for *The Weekly Standard* listing Clinton's various untruths, McCurry went after his job, too, complaining to the *Sun*'s Washington bureau chief, "You've got a conservative on your staff."

Then there was the *Washington Post*'s Peter Baker, who was hassled by

McCurry after calling for a comment about the subpoena issued in the Paula Jones lawsuit for Katherine Willey, the alleged victim of presidential ardor. "Mike, you're not going to talk me out of doing this story," said Baker. "This is a subpoena in a lawsuit we've been covering."

"I could subpoena you for cocksucking," screamed McCurry, before hanging up the phone and later complaining to Baker's boss.

More recently, and too late for this book, it's been reported that, in reaction to the Lewinsky mess, the president's men have been spreading stories regarding the sexual orientation of some of Starr's deputies and members of the media.

Kurtz is a media reporter, not really a media critic, and his week-by-week, scam-by-scoop account of the workings of the Clinton propaganda machine offers little in the way of overt chidings to his colleagues or remedies for their shortcomings. There is almost nothing here about the many dogs that didn't

"I could subpoena you for cocksucking," screamed McCurry before hanging up the phone and calling Baker's boss.

bark, the stories that the Washington crowd missed altogether. And although Kurtz mentions the famous sign that Ronald Reagan's press secretary, Larry Speakes, kept on his desk—the one which read, "You don't tell us how to stage the news, and we don't tell you how to cover it"—there is less than a page in the book comparing the Clinton-era press manipulations to those of previous administrations.

The book's most serious flaw is that old Washington media disease known as

source-coddling. To give his book an insiderish feel, Kurtz resorts to the Woodwardian device of explaining the thoughts and emotions of the story's actors without specifically citing his sources, contenting himself in an epilogue with "conversations are based on the author's interviews with one or more of the participants." And this has already led to the White House's counterspin on the book, which it is dismissing as "the Lanny diaries" because of Kurtz's tender treatment of former Clinton spokesman Lanny Davis, who was obviously a major source.

Still for all its faults, *Spin Cycle* provides a disturbing case study of White House information control that any sentient news consumer will want to read. You can bet that the spin counselors of presidential wannabes in both parties have already absorbed it as a how-to-manual. ■

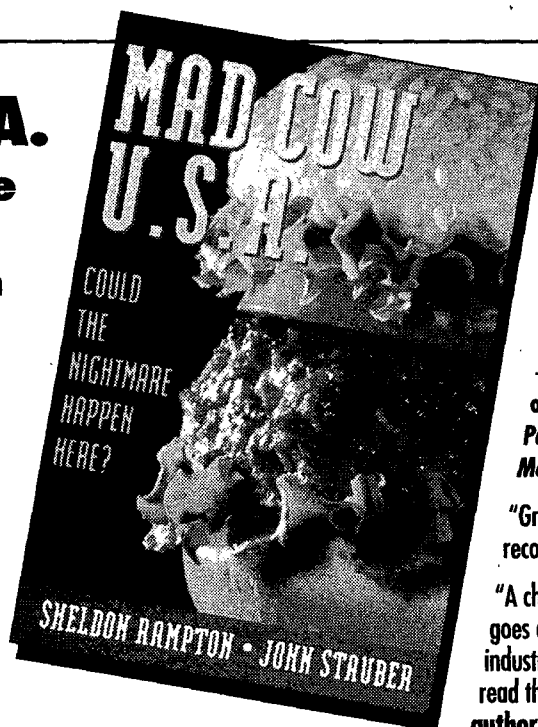
Doug Ireland, the former media critic for the *Village Voice*, has also been a columnist for the *New York Observer*, *New York* and the *Paris daily Libération*.

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by **John Stauber and Sheldon Rampton**
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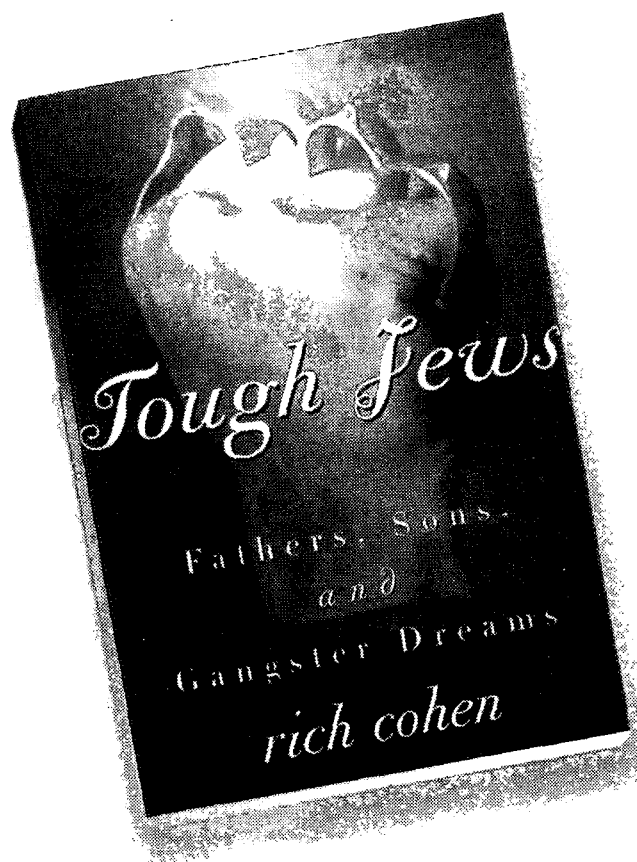
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Shalom, Godfather

**Tough Jews:
Fathers, Sons, and Gangster Dreams**
By Rich Cohen
Simon & Schuster
271 pages, \$25

REVIEWED BY J.J. GOLDBERG



Jews of my father's generation and mind-set have a favorite gangster: the way Catholics have a patron saint: a mythic figure who has left them a life lived, a style, a way of doing things," Rich Cohen writes in *Tough Jews*. That's the unusual, but effective, lens through which Cohen views his subjects. *Tough Jews* is a history of old-time Jewish gangsters unlike any you've ever read. It's part history, part hagiography, part poetry, part addle-headed philosophy—and it's all wrapped around the biography of a '30s Brooklyn hoodlum whom Cohen's own father idolized: Abe "Kid Twist" Reles.

"The Reles legend was handed down from my father to me," Cohen writes. "I have learned each detail, each step, each misstep, each act of bravery." And in *Tough Jews*, Cohen provides a vivid, detailed narrative of Reles' life and times, from his Brooklyn childhood to his mysterious death in November 1941, when he fell or was flung from a hotel window while in police custody. Along the way, he recreates the rhythms of Reles' immigrant Jewish neighborhood

and considers why young men like him took to crime. He lays out the history of the national crime syndicate in which Reles was a junior officer, bringing a fresh eye to legendary mob bosses, such as Meyer Lansky, Charles "Lucky" Luciano, Arthur "Dutch Schultz" Flegenheimer and Louis "Lepke" Buchalter, as well as resurrecting some forgotten goons, like "Bugsy" Goldstein, "Pretty" Levine and "Tick-Tock" Tannenbaum.

Reles' generation is of particular historical interest because they were pioneers in their field. Organized crime did not emerge in its contemporary form in urban America until the period between the two world wars. Before that, small criminal gangs had existed wherever poor immigrants clustered, but none was influential beyond its own particular neighborhood. It was only after World War I, the enactment of Prohibition and the massive wave of immigration that brought 20 million hungry Jews, Italians and Slavs to the United States between 1880 and 1920 that small-time criminal gangs combined to

form a sophisticated criminal network known as The Syndicate. That organization has had a huge grip on our national imagination ever since.

In today's popular mind, The Syndicate is an entirely Italian-American phenomenon. But it originally formed as an alliance between Italian gangs and Jewish gangs. In fact, it was a Jew who originally put the "organized" in organized crime. Arnold Rothstein, a New York gambler and dandy, saw the criminal possibilities of Prohibition before anyone else. In the early '20s, he assembled the large following that help him cash in on the 18th Amendment. His followers—Luciano and Lepke, Lansky and Dutch Schultz, Albert Anastasia, Benjamin "Bugsy" Siegel and others—created an organizational structure that has existed, more or less, ever since.

With, of course, one big difference. Luciano and Anastasia were succeeded by the likes of Gambino and Bonnano and Gotti. The Jews left no heirs. Lansky, who died of old age in 1983, is thought to be the last of his breed. The

Reles dispatched more than 100 victims, most of them hoodlums, some of them innocent bystanders, nearly all of them with sadistic brutality.

Jewish half of the mob disappeared.

Cohen wants to bring the Jewish end of The Syndicate back to life. Enter Reles, a mid-level mobster who knew most of the big timers. Reles headed a small gang in Brooklyn that was known for its coolly professional assassinations. By the mid-'30s, Reles' "troop" achieved stardom when Lepke recruited them as contract killers for The Syndicate. Reles and company began executing hits across the country; the newspapers dubbed them "Murder Incorporated."

Reles is a particularly apt candidate for biography because, unlike most gangsters, he left behind a memoir of sorts. Arrested in February 1940, he turned informer and spent two years telling prosecutors about the mob's inner workings—until his still-unsolved death cut his narrative short. (His confessions, filling 75 stenographic notebooks, helped prosecutors to electrocute Lepke and a half-dozen of his followers, and to imprison dozens more.) Cohen supplements these confessions by interviewing retired hoodlums, law enforcement officials and folks from Reles' old neighborhood—including Cohen's father. What he can't find out, he makes up—not by fabricating facts, but by imagining what must have been going on.

The flights of fancy, which Cohen never disguises, give the book a dream-

like quality. Describing the 1935 *bris*, or circumcision ceremony, of hitman Charlie "The Bug" Workman's newborn son, Cohen writes:

Guests began arriving in the afternoon. It was midwinter, so the ladies probably wore fur, their coats piled high on a bed. Some of the most important criminals in America were crowded into the apartment: Lepke, Gurrah, Moey "Dimples" Wolensky, Longy Zwillman, Reles, Strauss, Goldstein, Dasher, Maione. Good gangsters don't talk business around wives, so if there was anything important to say, one gangster probably took another to the bedroom and talked next to the coats. Maybe they felt the pile, making sure no one was hiding there.

Cohen is a wonderful writer and he spins a ripping good yarn. If he had left it at that, this would have been a very good book. Unfortunately, he wants to do much more. He wants to revive the Jewish gangsters because their memory makes his own life more meaningful. "For people like me, who grew up hearing only of the good Jews, fund-raisers and activists, the gangsters offer a glimpse of a less stable time, like the Ice Age, when a greater variety of species thrived on earth," he writes. "The Jewish gangster has been forgotten because no one wants to remember him, because my grandmother won't talk about him, because he is something to be ashamed of."

So Cohen dusts off an old American impulse: the outlaw romance. "Where I grew up," he writes, "it was understood: Even the most reckless Jew winds up in medical school. Well, the gangsters helped me clear this trap, showing me that since the worst is possible, so is everything else. If a Jew can die in the electric chair, anything can happen."

Surveying the landscape of contemporary Jewish life in America, it's not hard to sympathize with him. More than a few Hebrew school graduates have wanted to scream from the suffocating dullness of it all. Why not turn to gangsters?

But Cohen keeps going, trying to create a philosophy out of Reles' life. In the process he gets carried away. The gangsters, he writes, were:

A prototype of a new kind of Jew, the sporty, all-terrain model that would emerge from the ashes of World War II. Men like Lepke and Lansky were among the first Jews to know the truth about violence, that people pity the victims but yield to the victors. Long before the Holocaust, they knew something about learning, how little it means when jackboots hit the landing. These men were not religious in the go-to-temple, keep-the-Sabbath way, but they were all for the Jews. The best of them knew there was no running away, that you either become more of yourself, running toward your identity, or become nothing at all, Job fleeing God.

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The trouble is, he's writing about cold-blooded murderers. During their four-year run, Reles and Murder Inc. dispatched more than 100 victims, most of them fellow hoodlums, some of them innocent bystanders, but nearly all of them with sadistic brutality. There is no evidence that they shared their criminal profits with the poor. They were thugs.

While Cohen tries to acknowledge all this, his sense of romance runs too deep. Writing of Reles' turning informer, he writes, "To most people, I suppose, the murders are where all the sin resides, all those bodies. But to me, turning rat only compounded what the Kid had done. It means his entire life, even the just battles, amounted to nothing." It's a little hard to take seriously.

There's another problem. Cohen's complaints notwithstanding, the Jewish gangster isn't exactly a secret. Recent movies like *Bugsy* and *Billy Bathgate*, popular books like *Little Man* (Robert Lacey's 1991 biography of Lansky), and academic works like Jenna Weissman Joselit's *Our Gang* and Albert Fried's *The Rise and Fall of the Jewish Gangster in America* have kept the topic current decades after the phenomenon reputedly faded into history. The question isn't why the Jewish gangsters have been forgotten, but why they continue to fascinate.

Cohen has half the answer: They fascinate because so many Jews in America are tired of the sanctimonious choices offered by the established Jewish community. They show that it's possible to be a Jew and also to have muscles, red blood and a sense of humor. They appeal to Jews who want to get crazy and live dangerously now and then. Reliving the gangster era is a way of experiencing a sense of danger and making it feel like a part of the Jewish experience.

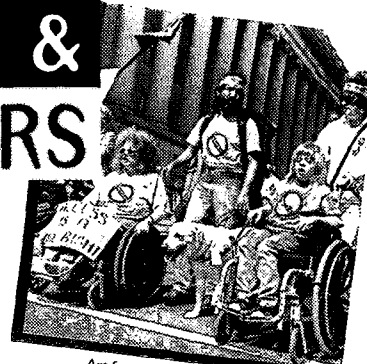
But Jewish gangsters also fascinate for another, darker—but ultimately more important—reason. To recall the Jewish gangsters of the '20s and '30s is to remember that Jews aren't so different from everybody else. Jews sometimes got off the boats and couldn't adjust. They turned to crime—in significant numbers—and made their neighbors' lives miserable. Just like later generations of immigrants from Asia and Latin America, the Jews who came to America from Poland a century ago paid their dues, took their knocks and made their mistakes. The mistakes are worth remembering, if only for the sake of humility.

The story of the Jewish gangsters will only be complete when somebody writes a book that puts them in their proper place in American Jewish history. That book doesn't end with Lepke and Lansky, but goes on to tell about the Israeli mobsters who roamed the streets of Los Angeles in the '70s and the Russian-born Jewish mobsters in Brighton Beach today.

Until then, it's worth retelling the stories we know. Rich Cohen's *Tough Jews* is the liveliest, most imaginative retelling yet. ■

J.J. Goldberg is a syndicated columnist and author of *Jewish Power: Inside the American Jewish Establishment* (Addison-Wesley).

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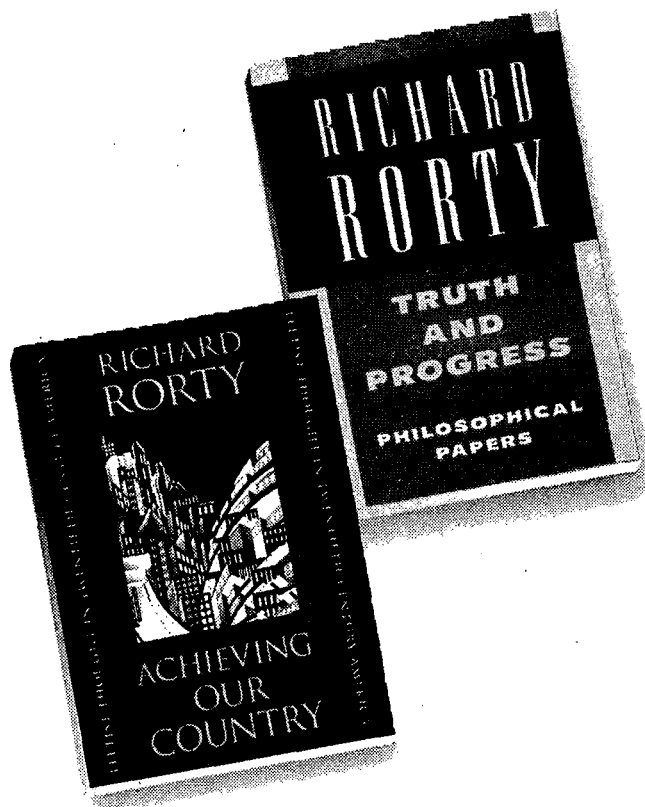
Left Patriotism

Truth and Progress: Philosophical Papers, Volume Three

By Richard Rorty
Cambridge University Press
355 pages, \$59.95

Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in Twentieth-Century America

By Richard Rorty
Harvard University Press
159 pages, \$18.95



REVIEWED BY JEFFERSON DECKER

From the crusade against slavery to the labor upsurge of the 1930s," historian Nelson Lightenstein has written, "all of America's great reform movements ... defined themselves as champions of moral and patriotic nationalism [against] parochial and selfish elites." For University of Virginia philosopher Richard Rorty, they had no choice but define themselves that way. "National pride," he says, "is to countries what self respect is to individuals: a necessary condition for self-improvement." National pride, he argues, is in desperately short supply these days, especially on the Left.

For many years now, Rorty has been one of the most important American pragmatists, defending the experimental modes of inquiry first propounded by John Dewey from both traditionalists and postmodernists. In 1979, he published *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, a sweeping critique of traditional claims to knowledge. Since then, he has been particularly harsh on what is sometimes called "philosophic liberalism"—metaphysical notions of unalienable rights and self-evident truths that presumably undergird American democracy. Instead, Rorty argues, such

values are contingent on place, time and ways of thinking.

For many other academics, this sort of antifoundationalism has been a ticket to philosophical radicalism. Some followed Michel Foucault, seeking to expose the hidden and malevolent "power" that liberals had been disguising in rhetoric about rights and freedom. Others followed Jacques Derrida into deconstruction, reveling in the utter indeterminacy of it all.

Rorty argued for something less dramatic. While postmodernists were convinced that an end of metaphysics signaled a crisis in Western society, Rorty railed against the notion that philosophy is the "pedestal on which our culture rests." A world without philosophic liberalism is, in his view, the best of worlds for political liberalism.

Political liberals, he says, support political programs that reduce human suffering and promote dignity. That sort of project does not need a universal, metaphysical foundation. His ideal political animal is someone he calls a "liberal ironist," one who is "devoted to social justice but who nevertheless takes her own devotion to this cause as merely contingent." We can "pull up the lad-

der," so to speak, from our philosophic foundations and still muddle through, pragmatically and experimentally, toward a better world.

"We intellectuals have been making claims to knowledge ever since we set up shop," Rorty writes in *Truth and Progress*, his latest collection of philosophical essays. "Once we claimed to know that justice could not reign until kings became philosophers ... More recently, we claimed to know it will not reign until capitalism is overthrown and culture decommodified." His articles refute both of those claims.

While they do not together make a single, unified argument, each of the essays is animated by Rorty's pragmatist opposition to "large, theoretical ways of thinking" and by the political events of 1989. Rorty thinks that the so-called "end of history" is a profoundly important opportunity for pragmatists on the left. Rather than trying to resurrect ideology in a vain effort to prove there is a coherent theoretical alternative to capitalism, the Left ought to be putting together a program of laws that reduce human misery: "We shall have to get over our fear of being called 'bourgeois reformers' or 'opportunistic pragmatists'

or 'technocratic social engineers'—our fear of becoming mere 'liberals' as opposed to 'radicals,'” he writes.

In *Achieving Our Country*, a brief but eloquent book, Rorty begs his academic colleagues to return to the real world. “I am nostalgic for the days,” he writes, “when leftist professors concerned themselves with issues in real politics (such as the availability of health care to the poor and the need for strong labor unions) rather than with academic politics.”

Achieving Our Country offers a morality play. In the past 25 years, Rorty says, national pride has come to be considered irrelevant—or even dangerous—by the Left. And, as a result, the Left, especially academics, has moved away from “real politics” and into “cultural politics.” One does not need a sense of national pride to argue that a piece of literature is ethnocentric. But one may well need national pride to campaign for universal health insurance.

To its credit, *Achieving Our Country* is not another jeremiad against identity politics. Rorty argues forcefully and eloquently that the academic left ought to be doing more to advocate against economic injustice. But his central point is that the American Left suffers from a deeper pathology. He wonders if the Left will ever be able to effect real change if it doesn't fundamentally change its relationship with this country.

Rorty's exemplars of healthy patriotic nationalism are Walt Whitman and John Dewey. Both Whitman and Dewey celebrated the American democratic project, but both were also utopians who believed that the United States could be better and do more. “America,” Whitman wrote, “is a great word, whose history ... remains unwritten, because that history has yet to be enacted.” The Left, says Rorty, ought to follow Whitman's example; it should be the “party of hope” that “insists that our country remains unachieved.”

For the first two-thirds of the century, what Rorty calls a “Reformist Left” did just that, fighting for a 40-hour work-week, women's right to vote and the New Deal. (Rorty defines “Reformist Left” as liberals, socialists and communists, explicitly smudging the lines

between them.)

But around 1964, he says, the Reformist Left fell apart: Congress passed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution and the Democratic Party failed to seat the delegates of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party at its national convention. A number of New Leftists, especially students, decided that it was no longer possible to work for social justice within the system. This was a disaster—not because a few people on the radical fringe decided to join the Weather Underground—but because many more decided that the United States was now beyond hope. “The American Left,” writes Rorty, “in its horror at the Vietnam War, reinvented sin.”

The post-'60s Left, he suggests, was beset by a widespread sense that national pride was inappropriate, those feelings better reserved for militarists and chauvinists. As the Left retreated into the literature departments of the academy, and became attracted to the apocalyptic philosophies of Martin Heidegger and Foucault, it began to distance itself from real political action. Young American intellectuals began to see themselves as cosmopolitan spectators instead of agents in the American system. They preferred, Rorty writes, “to think of themselves as a saving remnant—as the happy few who have the insight to see through the nationalist rhetoric to the ghastly reality of contemporary America. But the insight does not move them to formulate a legislative program, to join a political movement, or to share in a national hope.”

Rorty recognizes that his morality play is somewhat inconsistent. The New Left, even as it rebelled against the system, accomplished a great deal: ending *de jure* segregation and the

Vietnam War, launching the feminist and environmental movements. Rorty's distinction between “cultural politics” and “real politics” can be frustrating, since it implies that fights for tolerance are not “political,” but fights for economic justice are. Yet it's hard to argue when he tells the academic Left to “put a moratorium on theory” and “kick its philosophy habit,” or when he advises that the Left to retire a few favorite expressions (like “ideology,” “commodify” and “late capitalism”). What the Left needs, he says, is not critical theory but a set of laws it wants to enact.

After all, a cosmopolitanism of sorts has already been achieved. Young professionals fill up airplanes zipping from city to city and deal to deal. The academic conference circuit is no less jet-set or less global. Rorty himself reports attending a conference on the effects of globalization held in a room overlooking the beaches of Copacabana. At the same time, income inequality expands and fewer people feel their jobs are secure. America, Rorty argues, has achieved cosmopolitanism without emancipation. And that isn't enough. ■

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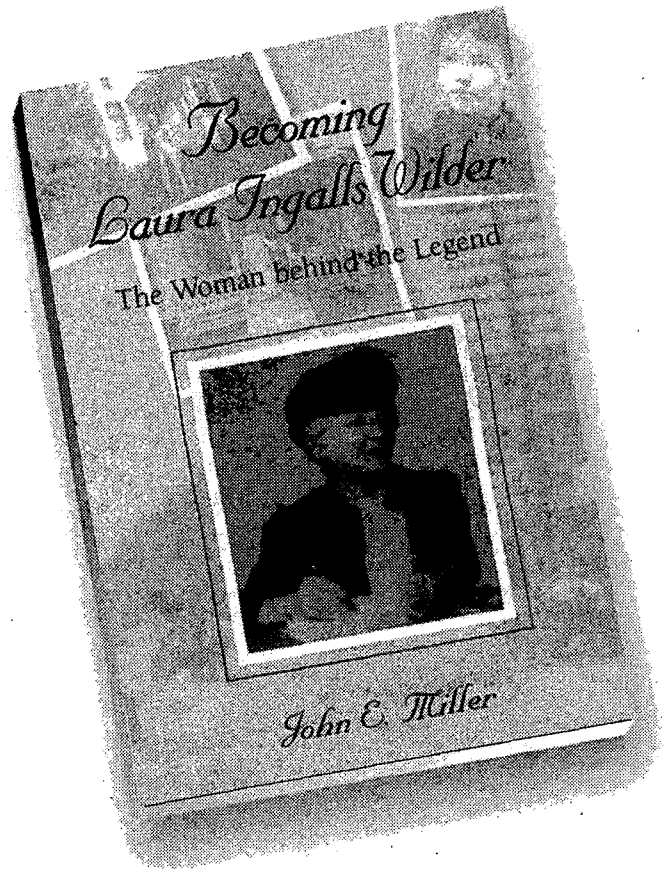
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Prairie Home Companion

Becoming Laura Ingalls Wilder: The Woman Behind the Legend

By John E. Miller
University of Missouri Press
312 pages, \$29.95

REVIEWED BY CATHY MASON



Some authors' work, read in childhood, resonates throughout our lives as both lesson and pleasant memory. Since her autobiographical series, the *Little House* books, were published between 1932 and 1943, Laura Ingalls Wilder has done just that. Generations of children have identified with her stories of a real family's hardships and joys in the West, told through the eyes of young Laura. Her "true" stories have an authority and immediacy that textbook history lacks, so that even adult readers find Laura's experiences compelling.

John E. Miller's absorbing new biography, *Becoming Laura Ingalls Wilder*, puts the author's early years in context before focusing on her adult life as a farmer's wife, mother, journalist and budding author. He discovers that, while her books relied upon our fascination with the pioneering years of the western expansion, Laura's life encompassed a full range of the modern American experience. Indeed Laura's very longevity is part of the story: She not only completed formidable journeys across the frontier in a prairie schooner with her family in the 1870s, but she flew on a jet to visit her daughter in the

1950s. Miller uncovers facts about Laura's life that were not revealed in her own work, and he places her experiences in a broader context. He makes her days on the frontier and the farm come alive with statistics on population and demographics as well as rich details about Indians and wildlife. Just as Laura herself tried to temper her child's fear of the Osage tribe of Kansas by portraying her father's ability to put himself in their shoes, Miller depicts the embattled position of the Indians while acknowledging the desire of the white settlers to acquire arable land.

As charming as the re-creations of her youth are, Miller contends that Laura's life was actually quite ordinary; there was little that foreshadowed her extraordinary writing career. But despite her seemingly circumscribed life, Miller tells us, "Laura retained a sense that she was different from other people, that there was something beyond the ordinary that she could accomplish."

Her parents, Charles Ingalls and Caroline Quiner, both grew up on farms in the Midwest, although their families hailed from the East. The offer of free land under the Homestead Act of 1862 compelled the extended Ingalls family,

including newlyweds Charles and Caroline, to move to Pepin, Wis., a town near the Mississippi river. Caroline gave birth to Mary in 1865 and Laura in 1867. Except for a brief sojourn into Kansas Indian territory in 1869 (the setting for Laura's most famous book, 1935's *Little House on the Prairie*) the Ingalls lived in Wisconsin until 1873, when Charles felt the "Big Woods" was becoming too crowded. In 1874, the family moved on to Minnesota, the setting for 1937's *On the Banks of Plum Creek*. It was there that Laura attended school for the first time.

Through setbacks that included a plague of locusts that devastated the crops and the death of an infant son in 1875, the Ingalls instilled in their daughters (they eventually had four) solid values of thrift, honesty and an ability to make home anywhere. Ma made sure their series of little houses were comfortable, and no matter how hard Pa worked he always took time in the evening to entertain the girls by playing his fiddle or telling stories. The Ingalls are the idealized parents of our collective imagination, wresting a living from the harshest circumstances while still willing to comfort and entertain

their children. As a potent American myth, the cozy domesticity of the *Little House* saga is as appealing as its sense of western adventure.

In 1879, the family made one last push west, as part of the land boom that rapidly followed the displacement of both buffalo and Indians from the Dakota territory. The Ingalls arrived in eastern Dakota, past the Big Sioux River and one step ahead of the advancing railroad, to help found the town of DeSmet. Laura placed four of her eight novels in this town, where she grew up, worked and married in the next 15 years. Although these were relatively prosperous years for the Ingalls, Laura left school at 15 to take a temporary teaching position so that Mary, who had gone blind, could attend a special college. Laura, the bright student who won praise for her compositions and spelling—and who, in middle age, would embark upon a writing career—received less education than any of her sisters. She continued to help support the family during her three-year courtship with Almanzo Wilder, a farmer 10 years her senior.

The two married in 1885 and Miller surprises us by attesting that Laura did not relish life as a farm wife. She dreaded the grueling work and constant money worries and was further discouraged when a hail storm destroyed their first crop. In fact, their early years of marriage were marred by a series of disasters: Almanzo was permanently weakened by diphtheria, their week-old baby

boy died, and their house burned down. Consolation came with the birth of the daughter they named Rose.

Encouraged by reports of bounty in the Ozarks of Missouri, the Wilders decided to resettle where they hoped the milder winters would benefit Almanzo's health. In 1894 the young family left the prairie behind for good. Laura never saw her parents or Mary again, and Miller speculates that circumstances did not allow her to visit DeSmet again until the 1930s. Despite her peripatetic childhood, after the age of 27, Laura spent the rest of her long life on her Rocky Ridge Farm near Mansfield, Mo. With time and distance between them, the memory of family and the indomitable prairie took on a potency that Laura would share with her daughter Rose, her community and, finally, the world.

A long series of circumstances led to the opening of a "new dimension of her personality" as a writer. Laura had kept a travel diary en route to Missouri and posted a descriptive letter of their journey to friends in DeSmet which was published in the local paper. She wrote little during the many years she and Almanzo spent establishing the farm and their social reputation in Mansfield. In 1911, Laura was asked to submit work to a farm paper, *The Missouri Ruralist*, after its editor heard a speech she had given to a women's group. The independent Rose had left home at 17 to work as a telegrapher in Kansas City, and by 1908 was making a name for

herself as a journalist in San Francisco. Laura visited California in 1915 with the purpose of learning to write from her professional daughter. Soon thereafter, she contributed a column for the paper headed, "What a Farm Woman Thinks," featuring good-humored lessons and practical advice. In 1930, upon Rose's suggestion, she began a book-length account of her life. It was only when her first-person memoir, *Pioneer Girl*, was rejected by several publishers, that she embarked on the more ambitious autobiographical children's series. Two years later, *Little House in the Big Woods* became a publishing sensation.

Miller argues that although Rose contributed much to the polish of her mother's work, she did not, as some scholars contend, ghostwrite the novels. She did "run it through her typewriter," suggest improvements in point-of-view and continuity, and bring Laura's work to the attention of publishers.

After 64 years of marriage, Almanzo died at the age of 92 in 1949. Laura, now a literary lion, lived on quietly at their farm and died three days after her 90th birthday in 1957. In her life and in her writing, Laura Ingalls Wilder successfully integrated what she had been with what she became. After getting to know Miller's Laura you may want to reacquaint yourself with the spirited young Laura of the writer's imagination. ■

Cathy Mason is a writer specializing in women's and cultural history.



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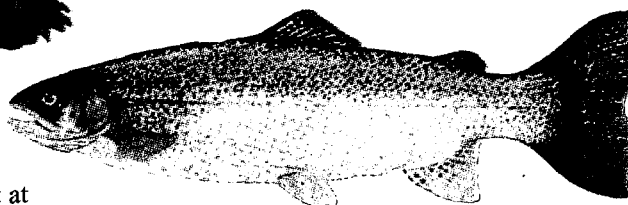
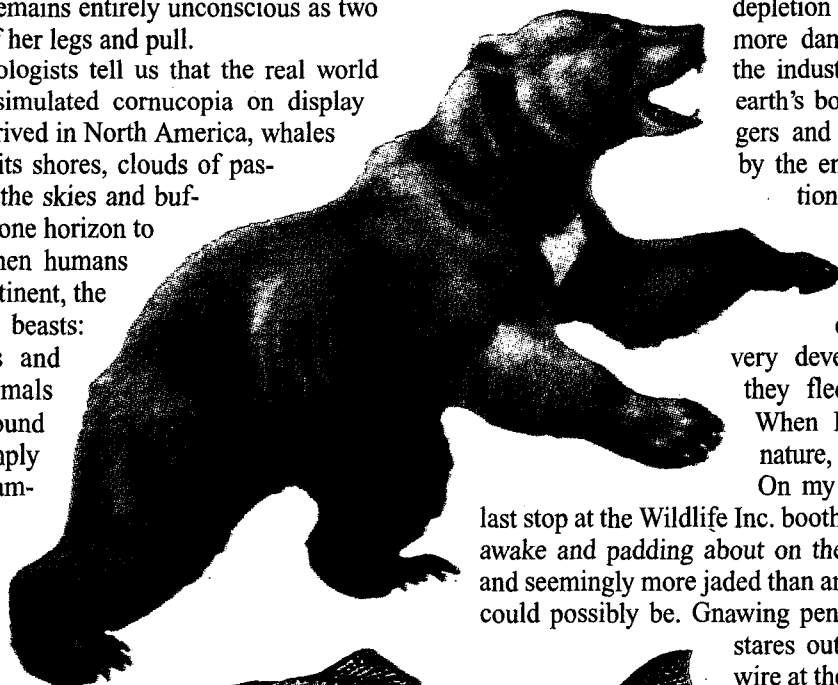
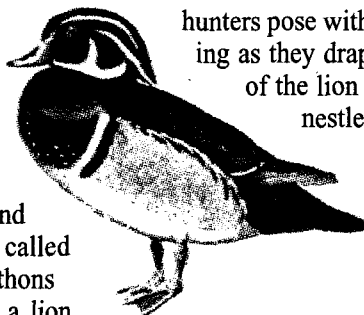
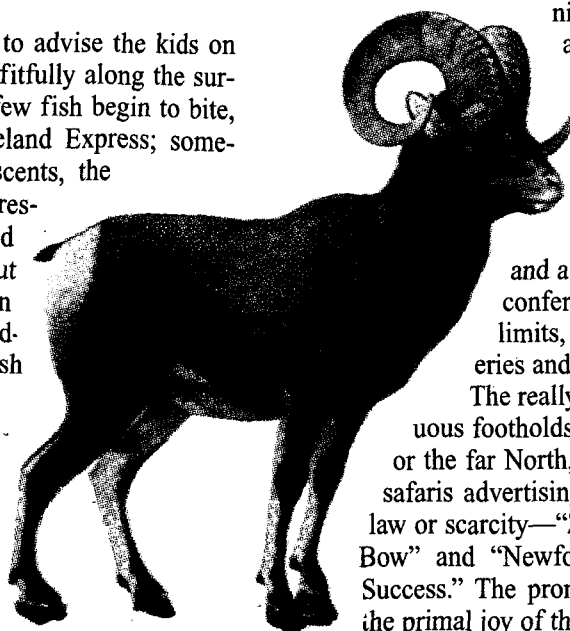
Continued from page 38

fish. The emcee interrupts his patter to advise the kids on technique: the trick is to tug the lure fitfully along the surface, in the manner of a wet bug. A few fish begin to bite, but still not enough to fill the Lakeland Express; something—the blinding overhead fluorescents, the clamor of the crowd, the looming presence of dozens of twelve-year-old anglers peering into the water—has put the fish off their feed. In desperation the emcee announces that anyone standing next to someone who catches a fish gets a free trip as well.

Everywhere I go I am confronted with more images of abundant and available nature. Salmon thrash, grizzlies pace and caribou flee across the innumerable video monitors in the hunting-lodge aisle. Taxidermy stands overflow with raccoons and coyotes frozen in mid-snarl. At the “3-D Archery Range” an endless video loop of strutting turkeys, rearing bears, skulking wolves and startled elk parades across a projection screen. Slowly, provocatively, they turn their flanks toward the waiting bow hunters, who pour arrow after arrow into the sweet spot just behind and below the shoulder where the vital organs bunch together. At the exotic end of the spectrum, a not-for-profit zoo promoter called Wildlife Inc. offers live photo-ops with tarantulas, pythons and other unsettling creatures. The star attraction is a lion cub named Taraka, who remains entirely unconscious as two pre-schoolers take hold of her legs and pull.

Historians and paleontologists tell us that the real world once far surpassed the simulated cornucopia on display here. When Europeans arrived in North America, whales spouted in profusion off its shores, clouds of passenger pigeons darkened the skies and buffalo herds stretched from one horizon to the next. Earlier still, when humans first set foot upon the continent, the land teemed with bigger beasts: mastodons, giant sloths and fierce arctic lions. Animals were so thick upon the ground that to hunt them you simply rounded them up and stampeded them off a cliff.

Those times are gone, a fact tacitly acknowledged by the Fishing and Hunting Show even as it tries to persuade us otherwise. Nowadays it's mostly the smaller and more furtive species that survive, living in murky water and dense brush, moving about at



night, all but invisible without the aid of the sonar sets, infrared scanners and night-vision scopes on sale throughout the hall. Animals no longer rely on strength or speed or even fertility, but on the kindness of state conservation agencies and a kind of second-class citizenship conferred by hunting seasons, fishing limits, and a welfare system of hatcheries and wild-release programs.

The really big game has withdrawn to tenuous footholds in the remote reaches of Africa or the far North, where it is pursued by package safaris advertising body counts unconstrained by law or scarcity—“Zimbabwe: Hunt Lion with Your Bow” and “Newfoundland Moose: Nearly 100% Success.” The promotional photos wistfully depict the primal joy of the hunt, unmediated by electronic doo-dads and Fish & Wildlife bureaucrats. In them, hunters pose with their quarry, faces flushed and beaming as they drape a too-familiar arm around the neck of the lion or impala they have shot; the animals nestle in strangely lifelike postures, legs tucked demurely beneath them, bearing mute witness to the dilemma of the hunter who wants to have his prey and kill it too.

Anglers and trophy hunters are not, of course, the main culprits in the depletion of wildlife. Infinitely more damage is done through the industrial harvesting of the earth's bounty by farmers, loggers and factory trawlers, and by the endless outward migration of exurbanites who, in their search for picture windows full of pristine scenery, draw in their wake the very development and sprawl they fled in the first place. When Man communes with nature, nature dies.

On my way out I make one last stop at the Wildlife Inc. booth, where Taraka is now awake and padding about on the concrete floor, tired and seemingly more jaded than an eleven-week-old cub could possibly be. Gnawing pensively on a stick, she stares out through the chicken wire at the crowd of people surrounding her pen. We stare back. ■

Bill Boisvert is a writer living in Chicago.

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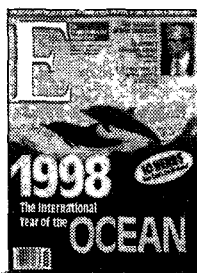
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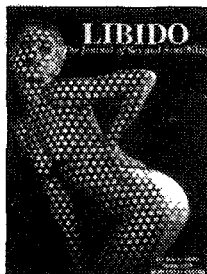


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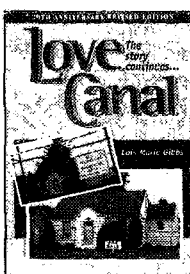
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In the end

By Bill Boisvert

The hardest thing about hunting deer," says Fred Lutger, "is finding them." Deer are nocturnal and cautious, and they tend to frequent briar thickets, cattail swamps and other places too scratchy and dark for humans. When you spot a deer, it's usually because the deer has chosen to come out of hiding. Which is why a few dozen men in flannel and camouflage (with a sprinkling of wives and girlfriends) have taken time out from the Chicago Fishing, Hunting, Travel and Outdoors Show to attend Lutger's seminar, "Twenty Five ways to Trick White-Tail."

Lutger, a renowned bow hunter and guide, is filling in on short notice for a colleague who has come down with pneumonia, so he details only a few of the subterfuges he uses to supplement his basic strategy of hiding up in a tree until a deer walks by. His ruses capitalize on the horniness and naiveté of young bucks caught up in the rutting season, or in the even more tense and addled "pre-rut" period. One trick is to rattle a pair of deer antlers together. This mimics the sound of two bucks locking horns over a doe, a spectacle that's sure to draw a crowd. Another involves the liberal sprinkling of "doe estrus

urine" around the hunting blind to convey the scent of ... well, you know. A portrait gradually emerges of the successful older buck, the one that lives long enough to grow a massive rack, as an aloof, suspicious type able to sublimate his sexual urges in lonely sojourns far off the beaten track.

After the seminar I wander back out on the floor of the Rosemont (Ill.) Convention Center, amid the freeways and office towers of edge city, U.S.A., and find that wildlife isn't at all hard to come by. Over at the "Trout Pond," three dollars will rent you a fishing pole and five minutes of access to a few hundred eight-inch rainbow trout drifting lethargically in a long plastic pool. Most of the customers here are kids, and their two basic fishing maneuvers—moving the lure straight up and down like a diving bell and raking it back and forth through the water like a weed-wacker—leave the trout distinctly unconvinced. This is a problem for the trout pond's sponsor, a charter-boat company that is trying to drum up business by giving away free "walleye fishing trips on Lake Erie aboard the Lakeland Express" to anyone who lands a

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